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MARCH 2002 MONTHLY

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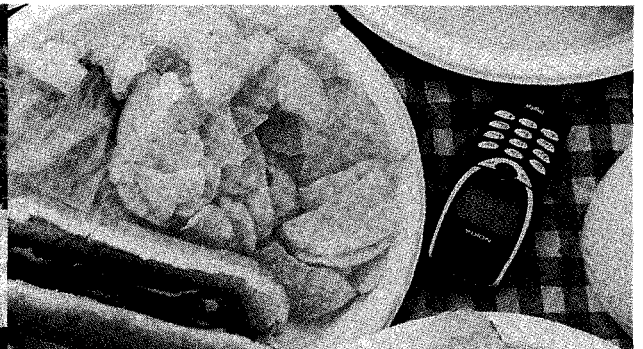
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THE Atlantic

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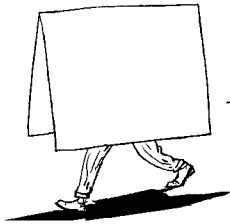
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IN THIS ISSUE

Were the pre-Columbian Americas the sparsely populated domains described in the history books—or a highly cultivated civilization with millions of inhabitants? Was the Amazon rain forest created and managed by a sophisticated society? **Charles C. Mann** (“1491”) is an *Atlantic* correspondent.

Robert D. Kaplan (“The World in 2005”) calls attention to powerful global phenomena that may seem unconnected to the war on terrorism but will inevitably intersect with it. Kaplan has been an *Atlantic* correspondent for more than a decade. His most recent book is *Warrior Politics: Why Leadership Demands a Pagan Ethos* (2001).

Over the past decade the United States has been riveted by violent crimes committed by seemingly ordinary teenagers. **Ron Powers** (“The Apocalypse of Adolescence”) examines some of these cases, including that of Robert Tulloch and James Parker, the Vermont youths charged with the murder of two Dartmouth College professors. Powers is the author of twelve books, including *Tom and Huck Don't Live Here Anymore: Childhood and Murder in the Heart of America* (2001). He received the 1973 Pulitzer Prize for criticism.

Iceberg harvesting has become one of Newfoundland's few new growth industries, as producers of beer, vodka, and bottled water seek new ways to exploit the cravings of the purity-obsessed. **Wayne Curtis** (“The Iceberg Wars”), a contributing editor of *Preservation* magazine, lives in Maine. He is at work on a book about the history of rum.

Marjorie Kemper (“God's Goodness”) has published stories in *New Orleans Review* and *Greensboro Review*. Her first novel, *Til That Good Day*, will be published later this year.

This month in The Agenda: *The Atlantic's* editor, **Michael Kelly**, considers the consequences of poking at walruses (the economic kind); **David Brooks** explains how his anticipated midlife crisis will be good for America; **Jonathan Rauch** shows why Americans have a big stake in the European Union's upcoming constitutional debate; **Margaret Talbot** looks at privatized eugenics; *The Atlantic's* national correspondent, **James Fallows**, describes the intellectual evolution of Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy secretary of defense; **P. J. O'Rourke** relishes the recent centenary statement by 103 Nobel laureates; **David Carr** discerns a throwback to the nineteenth century in *The New York Sun*, a newspaper about to make its debut; **Jeffrey Tayler** explains why Muslims in largely Islamic Tatarstan don't care about Osama bin Laden or Afghanistan; and **Peter Landesman** recounts a chilling conversation with an influential Pakistani.

Jacki Lyden (“An Ireland of Legend”) follows a 365-mile trail around Ireland in pursuit of the tempestuous Queen Maeve. Lyden is a senior correspondent and a host for National Public Radio and the author of the memoir *Daughter of the Queen of Sheba* (1997).

Stephen Budiansky (“Missing Pieces”) reports on the growing number of classical-music stations that are restyling themselves to provide middlebrow background music. Budiansky is a correspondent for *The Atlantic*. His next book, *The Character of Cats*, will be published in June.

Fleur de sel, the crème de la crème of salts, is rich, sweet, and expensive. **Corby Kummer** (“The Cream of the Salt Pan”), an *Atlantic* senior editor, travels to Portugal and discovers an affordable source. In his column *Palate at Large*,

Kummer observes culinary perfection at the Manhattan restaurant Daniel.

Peter Davison (“Poetry Out Loud”) describes the movement of poetry in the United States from the page to the stage. Davison is *The Atlantic's* poetry editor. His most recent book of poems, *Breathing Room*, won the Massachusetts Book Award in 2001.

Claire Messud (“The Beauty of the Conjuring”) surveys the dazzling prose and destructive force of Ian McEwan's new novel, *Atonement*. Messud is a visiting writer at Amherst College and the author of the novels *When the World Was Steady* (1995) and *The Last Life* (1999) and a book of novellas, *The Hunters* (2001).

Caitlin Flanagan (“Leaving It to the Professionals”) wades through the literature of the anti-clutter industry and concludes that the modern cult of simplifying has nothing on good, old-fashioned housekeeping. Flanagan is a frequent contributor to the magazine.

Brooke Allen (“Thrilling Desperation”) reviews Edna O'Brien's latest novel, *In the Forest*. Allen is a frequent contributor to *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The New Criterion*.

In the late 1990s Gilles Kepel, one of France's leading commentators on Islamic affairs, argued that Islamic radicalism was in decline. **Walter Laqueur** (“A Failure of Intelligence”) reviews Kepel's newly updated book *Jihad* (2000), a work of considerable value despite its shortsightedness. Laqueur, a professor emeritus of political science at Georgetown University, is the author of numerous books, including *Guerrilla Warfare* (1976), *A History of Terrorism* (1977), and *Generation Exodus: The Fate of Young Jewish Refugees From Nazi Germany* (2001).

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what's coming every day.

This month on the Web . . .

Charles C. Mann

Mann, a correspondent for *The Atlantic*, discusses this month's cover story, "1491."

Sir Walter Raleigh's "To His Son"

A poem by the Elizabethan writer and adventurer is read aloud by the poets Henri Cole, David Ferry, and Linda Gregerson, with an introduction by Gregerson.

Interview: Samantha Power

Power talks about her new book, *A Problem From Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*. An excerpt about the genocide in Rwanda ran in the September *Atlantic*.

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MARCH 2002

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PHOEBE-LOU ADAMS, who reviewed some 4,000 books for *The Atlantic Monthly* from 1952 to 2000, died on December 21, in Putnam, Connecticut, at the age of eighty-three.

Adams's reviews were not like other reviews: they were shorter and firmer, better informed and more briskly judgmental. Adams took delight in praising a work of original scholarship or stylistic freshness, whether it dealt with the weather, the Civil War, or Albanian antiquities. Books by better-known authors were treated without punctilio. Robert Manning, a former editor of this magazine, says of Adams, "She could pack more sound judgment, clarity, and wit into two paragraphs than most reviewers could into three or four pages. Her criticism could be withering, but her approval was golden, something an author could take to the bank." William Whitworth, another former editor of *The Atlantic*, says, "Phoebe was worldly and witty and she wrote beautifully. The range of her interests was continually surprising. Because she had good judgment and good taste, because she seemed to have read everything and been everywhere, and because she was fearless, she wrote with great authority."

Here, in its entirety, from 1972, is her review of *The Green Flag*, by Robert Kee: "Mr. Kee's history of Ireland is everything a history should be—well written, well organized, effectively documented, unsentimental, and thorough. It is also a tale of unrelenting misjudgment and malice, and inspires the blackest pessimism." Here, in its entirety, from 1983, is a review of *Truman Capote*, by Marie Rudisill: "In the course of describing the peculiar upbringing of Truman Capote, his Aunt Marie complains that her nephew has for years refused to speak to her. This memoir is not likely to improve family relations." Here, from 1969, is an assessment of Oscar Wilde's literary criticism: "It is easy to damn a book amusingly. Wilde could praise amusingly, a rare and difficult trick."

Phoebe-Lou Adams was New England to the bone. Raised in Warehouse Point, Connecticut ("a farming town with a couple of gin mills"), she graduated in 1939 from

Radcliffe College with an honors degree in English literature—which, she observed, "was worth about as much as a case of measles." For a while she was the librarian at the Hartford Retreat (now known as the Institute for Living); then she became a reporter for *The Hartford Courant*. She came to *The Atlantic* in 1945 as an editorial assistant, soon was asked to read manuscripts, and then became the poetry editor and a sometime travel writer. In 1952 she began writing her short monthly reviews, under various rubrics ("Books the Editors Like," "Editors' Choice," "Brief Reviews," and simply "PLA"). Her tenure here overlapped with that

of four editors in chief. She became the second wife of her original boss, Edward Weeks, and they were married for the last eighteen years of his life.

PLA's presence in our offices was powerful. Hers was far from a wholly bookish life. Schooled in hunting and fishing by her parents, she continued to take salmon-fishing holidays in Iceland or New Brunswick until she was eighty. For her last twenty years she staunchly drove back and forth from her house in northeastern Connecticut to Boston to sort, read, and evaluate what the publishers had to offer. She had to choose every month from hundreds of forthcoming books and relied on primitive means of selection: "I turn them over, I riffle the pages, I smell the glue, and then I consider the reputation of the publishing house and the author's reputa-

tion, if any. Many books by unknown authors turn out to be wonderful."

In later years, as junior staff members came and went, she did not know every name on the masthead, but her office was distinguished by the ancient and cumbersome houseplants that thrived in it, and by the clouds of tobacco smoke that (through indulgence) continued to billow there. Erect in posture, style, and diction, Adams enjoyed her whiskey after hours. She sat upright in her chair, which her back seldom touched. The coatrack outside her door was always crowned by the hat of the day. The Editors' Choice was a commodious fur cap that transformed Phoebe-Lou Adams into a painting by Frans Hals. ▀



Phoebe-Lou Adams (1918–2001)



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Red and Blue America

I agree with David Brooks's conclusion in "One Nation, Slightly Divisible" (December *Atlantic*): "There may be cracks, but there is no chasm. Rather, there is a common love for this nation—one nation in the end." But I am simply astonished that he can use a county only sixty-five miles from eastern coastal cities to compare Red America with Blue America. Franklin County has little or no resemblance to Colorado's San Miguel County, in the Rockies, or Custer County, in South Dakota's Black Hills, or wheat-producing counties in Iowa and Minnesota, or even Dickinson County, in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, not to mention the counties in Utah and Nevada desert country, or the counties in Washington and Oregon timber country.

People in the West share many of the ideas and thoughts of those anywhere else in America, but many of them have strong feelings of opposition to the encroachment of the federal government on private ownership and the increasing environmental restrictions on natural-resource production activities (mining, logging, and cattle raising) that have been their livelihood. To easterners—and make no mistake, the people in Franklin County are easterners—these are non-existent concerns, but they are very real to people in western Red America. They are not concerns that will keep the people from loving America, but they are concerns that must eventually be resolved.

Doris V. Geist
Cleveland, Ohio

David Brooks observes that most Americans don't criticize or try to change other people's religious and moral beliefs. From this he concludes that there is no "culture war" in America.

Americans, however, let their ballots do the talking, and in the 2000 election

they voted as if there was indeed such a war. A Pew Foundation-funded survey vividly illustrates the religious divide: observant white Christians (those who regularly attend church services) made up 60 percent of Bush's popular vote. Gore, on the other hand, attracted a large proportion of secular voters and less observant Christians.

Margaret Slotnick
Prospect, Ky.

Speaking as one raised and firmly ensconced in Red country, I think David Brooks did a credible job of presenting us in all our diversity. I also find his Ego Curtain a very helpful heuristic tool. I do have one small quibble, however, and that is his claiming of NPR as a Blue possession. From my solidly central-Illinois home I receive at least four different NPR stations (three FM, one AM), with varying talk, blues/jazz, and classical-music formats, but all carrying the major national morning and evening news programs. All those stations are well supported in local fund drives, often ending their drives early because funding goals have been met ahead of schedule. At least three of the most popular NPR shows with national syndication—*A Prairie Home Companion*, *Whad'Ya Know?*, and *This American Life*—not only originate in the Midwest but also do a very respectable job, I think, of answering Brooks's challenge to find interpretations of Red America as seen through Red eyes.

Daniel Liechty
Normal, Ill.

I suggest an emendation to David Brooks's comment "Because the information age rewards education with money, it's not surprising that Montgomery County is much richer than Franklin County." That causation is not established. A reverse causation is pos-

sible: affluence in Montgomery County may allow larger purchases of education. Also, college-educated parents working in Montgomery County may be more insistent that their children obtain college educations—which reminds me of an approximate quotation from Winston Churchill: "Education is the process by which people learn to live comfortably with those who are similarly educated." The annual *Forbes* survey of CEO compensation often shows high school graduates earning more than college graduates. Tuition-paying parents should not dismay; some causation exists, but there are a lot of exceptions to the rule. Also, kids from Franklin County should know that they, too, have tremendous educational opportunity in this country.

Steve Hample
Bozeman, Mont.

David Brooks asserts in his report on Red and Blue America that "where [the Reds] live, they can afford just about anything that is for sale," and that this contributes to their lack of class consciousness.

Health care is at least one exception. It can cost \$10,000 a year to insure a family of five, and \$3,000 for an individual policy, if one is not covered through an employer's plan. How many in Red America, not able to afford such policies, are among our 43 million uninsured?

Beginning in 2002 nine states, largely in Bush's Red America, will not have Medicare HMO choices: Alaska, Arkansas, Maine, Montana, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, and Wyoming. Four more—Delaware, Kentucky, Nebraska, and West Virginia—will have no plans that offer drug coverage. These Red states don't have big enough markets to keep profit-driven health-care providers interested.

Judy M. Jensvold
Ithaca, N.Y.

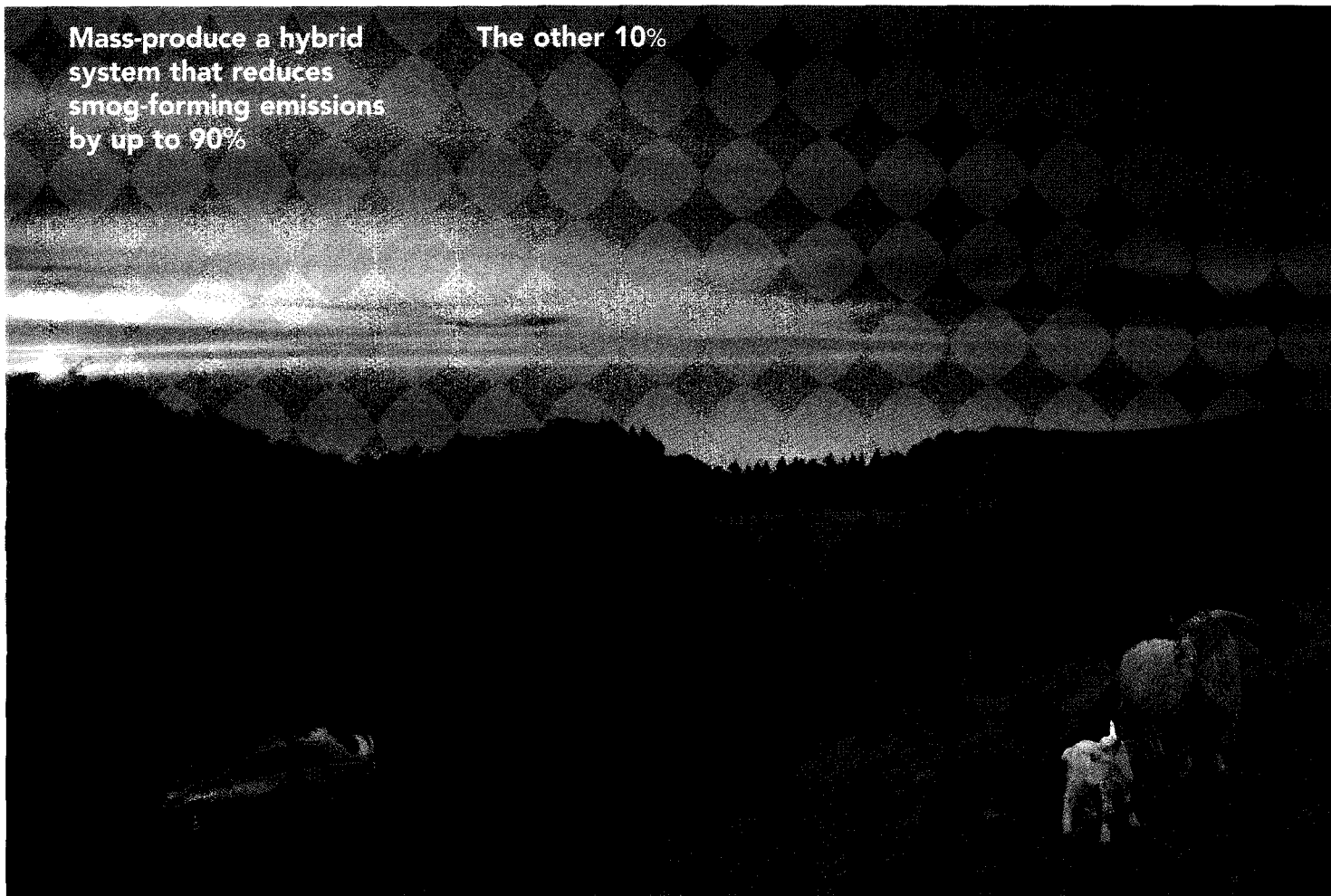
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In 1997, Toyota was the first car company in the world to mass-produce a hybrid vehicle. By combining gasoline and electric power, the Prius reduces smog-forming emissions*, cuts gas consumption in half, and, in short, has revolutionized the way cars affect our environment.

Even so, we're not resting on our laurels. The Toyota Hybrid System is being further refined, to make it cleaner and more efficient. And we're continuing to search for even greener forms of transportation.

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*Based on measurements of hydrocarbons and oxides of nitrogen. Compared to the average car. ©2002

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America's middle class does not consist entirely of nincompoops, unable to sense their socio-economic interests, as it might seem from the interviews described by David Brooks. He does not mention that voters with family incomes under \$30,000 went overwhelmingly for Gore. A slight majority of voters with family incomes under \$50,000 went for Gore also. And so did the majority of all women, by 11 percent.

Brooks describes Montgomery County—in the Blue zone (where Gore prevailed)—as populated by high-income lawyers, doctors, and stockholders. This conjures up the caricature of limousine liberals. The reality is that people with family incomes over \$50,000 voted for Bush by a wide margin.

*Boris Danik
North Caldwell, N.J.*

Samuel Huntington

I read with great delight Robert D. Kaplan's insightful article on Samuel Huntington ("Looking the World in the Eye," December *Atlantic*). As a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard in 1996–1997, I had a chance to discuss with Huntington his views on political order and democracy and on "the clash of civilizations." As an Arab and a practicing Muslim, I found myself in agreement with Huntington's celebrated, controversial, and often misunderstood argument that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will be not primarily ideological or economic but cultural. Indeed, lost in the widespread dismissal of this thesis as a policy blueprint for State Department hawks is the theory's merit in attempting to acknowledge real and basic civilizational differences and the international effect of their political application. *The Clash of Civilization's* strength (and usefulness, as a frame of analysis in the post–September 11 world) is its honesty. Its premises are straightforward and (romantic, make-believe world views aside) undeniable: the world is *not* Westernizing; Asia and Islam are expanding; and culture consciousness is getting stronger.

*Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou
International Council on Human Rights
Versoix, Switzerland*

Samuel Huntington is quoted as saying that economic sanctions, shortages, and hardships never lead to the downfall of revolutionary regimes, because sacrifice is proof of commitment in a revolutionary situation: "Revolutionary governments may be undermined by affluence; but they are never overthrown by poverty."

But a "revolutionary situation" is always temporary, because ideological fervor can't be sustained indefinitely, even under sanctions. Revolutions eventually have to deliver in material terms; if they can't, they become vulnerable to food shortages as well as to luxury hotels. One defense is some form of totalitarian control, which is what revolutionary regimes finally turn to, with numbing predictability. Coercive control, not revolutionary commitment, is the reason that material shortages do not lead to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein or Fidel Castro.

Compared with revolutionary fervor, the kind of self-interest characteristic of capitalist systems has the great advantage of being an extremely reliable motivator in the longer run; it doesn't wear off. But maybe the lesson of recent events is that there is a third way—namely, motivation that derives from fundamentalist religious beliefs. A divine extension of self-interest, with martyrs motivated by promised payoffs in the afterlife, for example. Is it possible that such motivation not only won't subside with time but also is immune to the effects of both poverty and affluence? If so, we are in for a very hard and very long fight.

*Byron Matthews
Sandia Park, N. Mex.*

Samuel Huntington writes that "large numbers of people resent our wealth, power, and culture, and vigorously oppose our efforts to persuade or coerce them to accept our values of human rights, democracy, and capitalism." Of course, hidden in the phrase "human rights, democracy, and capitalism" is a constellation of possible world views and ways of living that accord individuals the freedoms inherent in the liberal ideal. Societies need not adopt the American model of liberal, democratic capitalism to make significant and substantive improvements in the conditions

that allow freedom to flourish. In reality, the resentment of which Huntington writes is much less that of people in, for example, Islamic or Asian nations, and more that created and shaped by elites and states that cannot afford to loosen restrictions on individual freedoms, for fear of losing their grip on power. As for the citizens in these states—how many who express resentment of the United States would jump at the chance to enjoy the freedoms we have?

*David Narum
Arcata, Calif.*

Response to Terrorism

Christopher Hitchens ably demonstrates that in the debate about the appropriate response to September 11, plenty of irrational arguments come from the left ("Stranger in a Strange Land," December *Atlantic*). But he makes the same fundamental mistake as President Bush in implying that our only choices are to be in favor of bombing Afghanistan or in favor of (or at least not sufficiently against) the Taliban.

Most of us would agree that the Taliban are brutal rulers and that the people of Afghanistan would be better off under a different government. Most of us would come to the same conclusion about Iraq, Libya, and Zaire. It does not follow that using military force to attempt to remove one government and install another will advance our long-term goals. Publications as disparate as *The New York Review of Books* and *The Wall Street Journal* are reporting growing hatred of the United States in Muslim countries as a result of the bombing. This is where new terrorists come from. Does Hitchens feel safer now than he did on October 6? I don't.

*Malcolm Pittman
Cambridge, Mass.*

Christopher Hitchens has it precisely correct—many on the left would sooner shack up in an Afghan cave for the winter than share a foreign-policy position with a capitalist federal government. Many on the far left, still mired in Vietnam, smell jingoism on anyone "ignorant" enough to support overseas military action by any President since

FDR. Worse still in their eyes are those of us who might condemn aggression against America in the form of, say, driving airplanes into buildings. Since the second week in September the far left has gone reactionary, counterattacking the flag wavers with its own dogma—"stateless jingoism" or, more accurately, "anti-state jingoism." (Tolerance for free thought and free speech extends only so far here. The dogma might go something like this: one should celebrate diversity as long as it's nothing *so* "diverse" as outrage at those directly responsible for the destruction of September 11.)

This line of thinking, underdeveloped as it is, is damaging for the rest of us on the left—and for the country. It lends fuel to the Bush Administration's creeping "watch what you say, watch what you do" mentality. The notion of a politically guaranteed right to free speech is largely American, and it's generally invigorating to see that right exercised, however foolishly. But the more the "capitalists" who worked in the World

Trade Center or at the Pentagon are blamed for their own early deaths, the more interested the present Administration will become in revamping—à la George Orwell—the current understanding of free speech.

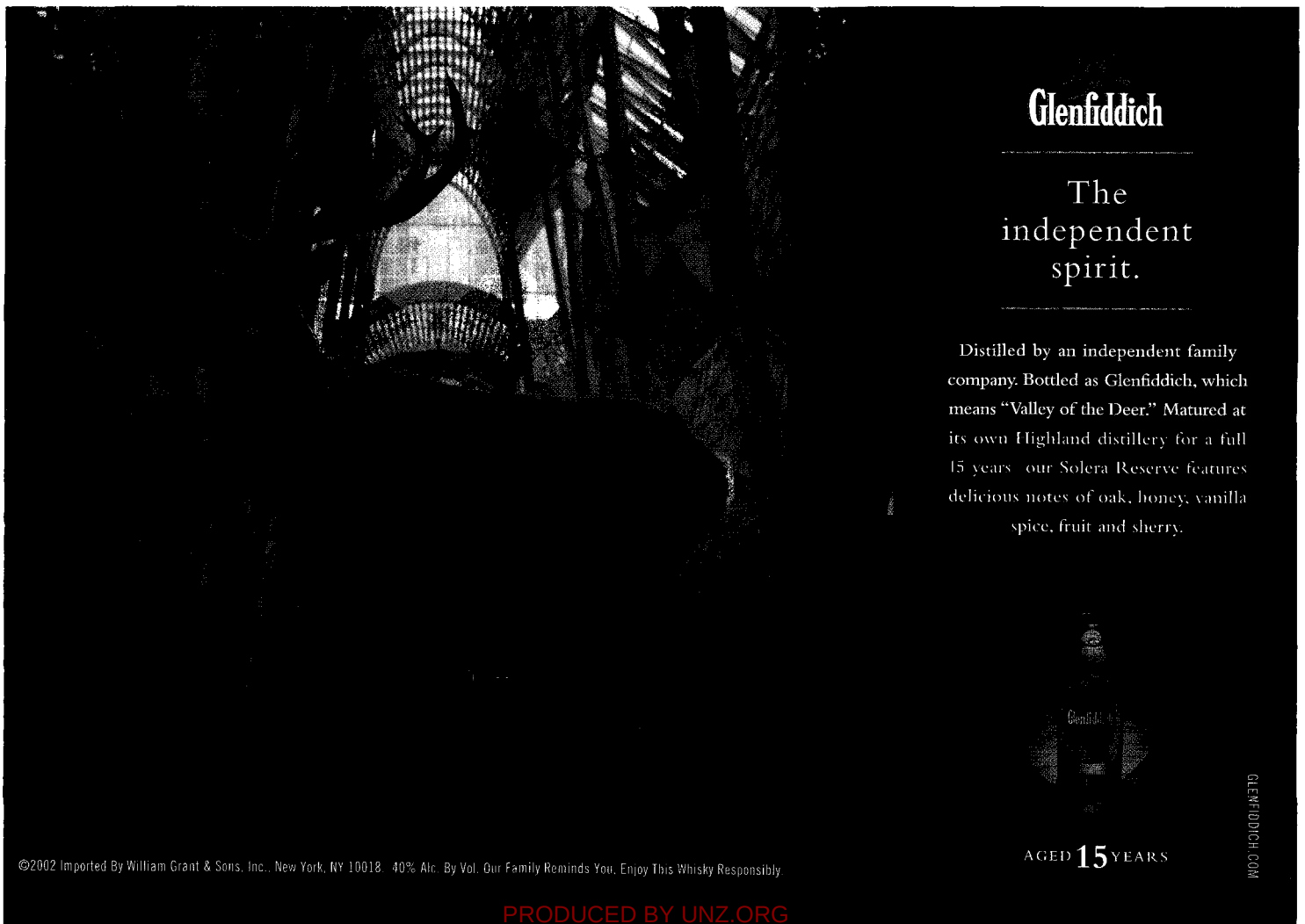
*Jeffrey David Peckham
Cranston, R.I.*

Civil Liberties

In his "Security Versus Civil Liberties" (December *Atlantic*), Richard A. Posner, writing about the concerns of civil libertarians after September 11, makes a strong case for the proposition that civil liberties "should be curtailed, to the extent that the benefits in greater security outweigh the costs in reduced liberty," saying, "All that can reasonably be" expected is that officials "weigh the costs as carefully as the benefits." As his references to World War II and the Civil War make clear, his implicit assumption is that the war on terrorism is like those wars and not like the war on drugs. But

the war on terrorism bears a closer resemblance to the latter, because both are metaphoric wars, and that is why the pursuit of drug dealers—with, for example, random searches and profiling of subjects on the basis of racial and ethnic identity—"impair[s] civil liberties." The problem is not that civil libertarians are "prioritizing ... liberty" but that civil libertarians don't recognize the dangers of metaphoric language.

In customary usage wars are armed conflicts between nations or internal conflicts like our Civil War, and they end when one side surrenders and sues for peace. A metaphor, as the philosopher Max Black pointed out, brings "two separate domains into cognitive and emotional relation by using the language appropriate to one as a lens for seeing the other." The advantages of seeing the defense against terrorism through the lens of war are obvious: wars arouse feelings of patriotism that reinforce the willingness to make the sacrifices necessary to prosecute the war successfully. One



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disadvantage is perhaps less apparent: metaphoric wars can never be brought to a successful conclusion. Whereas terrorist networks or drug cartels are groups of criminals who can be apprehended and tried, as with all forms of crime, there will always be other criminals taking their place. That is one reason why the war on drugs is "a big flop"; in a metaphoric war there is no one who can surrender and sue for peace.

*Murray Hausknecht
Long Island City, N.Y.*

Richard Posner's argument that civil liberties must and should be sacrificed to ensure security is little more than an ill-disguised version of the Vietnam-era non sequitur "We had to destroy the village in order to save it." Posner argues that "we are a nation under law, but first we are a nation," and hence "even legality must sometimes be sacrificed for other values." This is an absurdity: the primary purpose of a nation (or, at least, this nation) is to preserve the liberties of its inhabitants. Indeed, as we hear repeated admonitions to make sacrifices for our nation in time of war, we should pause to remember why we assume that this nation is worth making sacrifices for. If not because it provides its citizens with liberty, then what reason could there be? And if that liberty is taken away in the name of "security," then what, pray tell, will be left that is worth fighting for?

*Gordon Danning
Berkeley, Calif.*

Richard A. Posner replies:

Murray Hausknecht makes a good point—that because a "war" against terrorism, like the "war" against drugs, has no natural terminus, severe measures taken in it may become permanent, rather than being temporary, and may habituate us to a permanent loss of civil liberties. He may be too pessimistic; but supposing he is not, I still would not change my view that the events of September 11 justify some curtailment of civil liberties. The "war" we are now and may for a long time be waging against international terrorism is not metaphoric in the same sense as the war on drugs. The latter is an effort to stamp out a victimless crime no worse than a vice; the proper analogy is Prohibition. The war against al Qaeda is a war

against an international private army that has shown itself capable of killing thousands of Americans in a matter of minutes and that could and doubtless would kill millions if it could get its hands on biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons—which it may yet do.

Gordon Danning's argument is an overstatement. Constitutional principles are important, but preserving them is not our "primary purpose"; preserving our lives and our sense of security, preserving our property, and preserving our happiness—all deeply threatened by international terrorism—are important too.

They are important enough to justify reconsideration of some of the civil liberties that we embraced when we thought we were safe.

Objectless Verbs

I am interested in Cullen Murphy's objection to transitive verbs without direct objects, as in "The movie fails to excite" ("Out of the Ordinary," October *Atlantic*). My own editors sometimes object if I write a sentence like "This explanation does not satisfy." (One wonders if Robert Browning's editors objected when he wrote, in "Caliban Upon Setebos," that the "time to vex is now.") Murphy, and I assume my editors, think they are objecting because of a lack of clarity: Murphy asks, "Does the potential activity embodied in [such] verbs ... exist as an independent force, swirling atmospherically, regardless of whether actual people or things are affected?"

The difficulty is that the objection is not *really* one about clarity. I will bet Murphy would be satisfied with "The movie is not exciting," just as my editor was with "This explanation is not satisfactory," even though neither substitute sentence is any clearer about what or who is being excited or satisfied. One could, of course, not dilute the verb, and add a say-nothing direct object, as in "The movie does not excite the viewer, us, etc.," with no greater gain in clarity. Does not "us" also swirl in the great atmosphere of non-significance?

I suspect the objections here really have to do with a distinction between mental events (excitement, satisfaction, vexation) and physical events. I will bet (again) that Murphy would not object

to a sentence like "The lion is stalking," even though we do not know if it is stalking zebra, springbok, or whatever.

*William Crisman
Associate Professor of English
Pennsylvania State University
Altoona, Pa.*

Cullen Murphy replies:

Professor Crisman's assessment intrigues.

Madame Solario

In reading Brooke Allen's survey of the works of Sybille Bedford ("An Observer of Catastrophe," October *Atlantic*) I did not find any mention of a book also rumored to have been written by her: *Madame Solario*, published anonymously in 1956. I have just reread it in a Penguin reprint, and it indeed seems Bedfordian. Set early in the past century, it has a strong whiff of scandal and family debacle. Can you enlighten me?

*Joan Leaf
San Francisco, Calif.*

Brooke Allen replies:

I had never heard of Madame Solario, but was able to reach Sybille Bedford through her agent in London. According to her, Madame Solario was written by Gladys Theodora Parrish Huntington, who usually wrote under her maiden name, Gladys Parrish. Madame Solario was published the same year as A Legacy, and because their subject matter was vaguely similar—"Anything about the upper classes, they always assume it's me," Bedford comments—the two novels were often reviewed together; eventually Huntington and Bedford met, and they remained friends for the rest of Huntington's life.

Advice & Consent

Bruce Moomaw (Letters, February *Atlantic*) accuses me of writing that the nuns murdered in El Salvador "deserved it." That is totally untrue. My article in *The American Spectator* (February 1981) described "radical nuns" in general. There was no mention of anyone's being murdered, or of anyone's "deserving" anything.

*Tom Bethell
Washington, D.C.*



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INNOCENT BYSTANDER

by CULLEN MURPHY

THIRD-CLASS CITIZEN

Whose lifestyle is it anyway?

.....

The page fell open to Item No. 7000J: *Oralgene Electric Tongue Cleaner*. This device "vibrates to effectively eliminate the plaque coating from your tongue without causing a gag reflex," the text explained. "Use it after brushing and flossing for optimum oral hygiene."

It is the time of year for casting a last, wistful look at the moldering piles of seasonal catalogues, and for marveling once more at the ingenious outlets that human expression has found. I found myself taking notes. Item No. NS922OJ: *The Revolutionary Guillotine Cigar Cutter*. "A working model, with a real stainless steel blade, mounted on gold plated framework. Detailed down to the bucket that fortunately now receives only cigar tips." Tony Soprano probably has one—and yet so must thousands of ordinary people, given that NS922OJ keeps appearing in catalogue after catalogue. Item No. V8050J: *Shiitake Mushroom Log*. "Just add water, place the log in a cool, dark place ... and it will produce a first crop in 10 days." Item No. 50700J: *The "Keep Your Distance" Insect Vacuum*. "Flies, bees, spiders, and other insects are suctioned by the 14,000 rpm fan and drawn into a sealed disposable cartridge." Item No. M235: *Life Hammer*. "What happens if your seat belts won't release, or the door locks jam? The Germans, no strangers to high-speed fatalities, have developed a Life Hammer." Item No. M697: *Autobahn Non-Skid Desk*. "Strap Autobahn Desk into your front passenger seat with the existing seatbelt, and establish a spacious, flexible work space right next to you ... Non-skid material keeps your briefcase or computer from sliding when you hit the brakes!" No wonder they needed a Life Hammer.

Every year the miracle of recombinant

mail-order DNA brings new biota into the house. I have only the typical layman's grasp of where these things come from, but I welcome them all. This winter saw the unbidden arrival of the largest and most exotic specimen ever—*The Extreme Covert Catalog*, a thick compendium of espionage equipment and supplies. It is safe to say that *The Extreme Covert Catalog* would satisfy almost anyone's routine surveillance and counter-surveillance needs. It sells video cameras hidden in eyeglasses, video cameras mounted on tiny helicopters, video cam-

spider-like net over a fleeing suspect, or ... anyone else one would wish to net."

The Extreme Covert Catalog provides contact information for a wide array of services and retailers. Spousewatcher.com offers "the top seven ways to spy on your significant other." Disappearing.com sells a system that "lets individuals write their messages in the digital equivalent of disappearing ink." Tanksforsale.co.uk lives up to its name, with armored vehicles from Eastern Europe (or from World War II) and even some secondhand artillery. The catalogue is careful to note that the



eras embedded in what look like chunks of roadway asphalt heaved up by frost. It sells wiretap-detection systems, computer-keystroke recorders, cell-phone interceptors, vehicle-tracking devices, and armored bodywear. At \$480, the Japanese-made *Hyper30 Wave Wall* jamming unit is hard to resist; it shuts down all cell-phone communications within thirty meters. Item No. 135620: *Reverse Peephole Scope*. "No more guessing at who or what you will be greeted by when they answer the door." Item No. NT-D210: *Flying Spider*. "Fires a large

use of certain technologies by private parties in the United States may constitute a federal Title III felony, and that some products cannot legally be imported. It adds helpfully, "There are at least three worldwide mail drop directories on the market as we speak, who will, for a small payment, collect and forward your mail to you sans incriminating return address."

I'm still not sure how I got on *Extreme Covert's* list—probably not through Orvis or Lands' End. The cover letter that came with the catalogue stated simply, "*The Extreme Covert Catalog* has your number."

GREG CLARKE

When the Sears mail-order catalogue ceased publication, in 1993, after nearly a century, newspapers around the country lamented "the passing of a way of life." Scholars noted the catalogue's important role in uniting a far-flung nation, and observed that its value as a tool of historical inquiry remained immense. The commodious seasonal volumes hold an intimate record of social aspirations and commercial realities, of economic activity and leisure time, of changes in technology and fashion and taste. Historians use them to help reconstruct ordinary American domestic life of the 1890s or 1930s in astonishing detail.

Of course, as we know, the death of the Sears catalogue has not quite brought the passing of a way of life. The most recent online edition of the *Teraglyph Atlas of Direct Mail Catalogs* offers contact information for more than 15,000 mail-order publications. In all likelihood today's catalogues will be as useful to historians in the future as the old Sears catalogues are to historians now. Indeed, an image of day-to-day post-industrial life emerges from today's third-class mail with startling clarity. As social historians will one day confirm, a typical day for a third-class citizen probably began like this:

Respond to *Hammacher Schlemmer Radio-Controlled Alarm Clock*. Synchronized with official U.S. atomic clock, in Boulder, it emits crescendo alarm—"increases in volume and intensity until turned off." Raise head from *Chillow*, perma-chilled pillow insert with "leak-proof seal to lock in thermo-regulated coolness"; no more night-long pillow flopping for relief from hot spots. Check pulse and blood pressure on *Wrist Doctor*. (Normal.) Credit for good night's sleep goes to *Chillow* and also to digitized "serene personal sound environments" (Rainforest, Ebb Tide, Foghorns) generated by *Sound Soother*. Credit shared by *Back-Saving Horizontal Reading Glasses*, which bend vision 90 degrees; allows reading or watching TV from recumbent position. (Also allows up-right shy people to look at shoes while seeming to peer straight ahead.)

Time for ablutions. First, sweep bedroom with *SpyFinder Hidden Camera Locator*. (Negative.) Apply *Turbo-Groomer* to nostrils and ear canals: "Surgical-steel

rotary blades whirl faster than 4,000 rpm inside a protective ergonomic guide ... A bright little 'headlamp' ensures that nothing is missed." Next: *Panasonic Cordless Oral Irrigator*. After shower, don *Thunderwear* holster ("distributes the weight of your weapon ... evenly around the hips") over *Level IIIA Ballistic Groin Cup* ("protection against fragmentation") before strapping on wireless *ElectroFlex* unit "for ab stimulation while cleaning, cooking, working, walking or whatever." *ElectroFlex* easily concealed under *Body Shield Sport Jacket*, offering "full torso protection" and "weekend styling with zip front and slouch pockets." Hang *Ultra-Mini Air Supply* around neck—"draws contaminated air inside its unique corona discharge chamber." Final touch—*QuietComfort Acoustic Noise Cancelling Headset*, "originally pioneered by Bose for use by military personnel and private pilots."

The world awaits. Scan catalogues at breakfast—order *Voice Changer* and *i-Cybie Robotic Dog*. Mysteriously, *Extreme Covert Catalog* missing. (Hmmm.) Rise from table with *Uplift Seat Assist*, "self-powered lifting cushion" that aids transition from seated to erect posture. Switch on *Electric Glove Heaters* and *Electric Boot Heaters*, experiencing "flood of soothing warmth" despite storm left overnight by *Backyard Blizzard*, "down-sized snow-maker that uses the identical technology as commercial models." Outside, *Life Finder LF-3 TM Thermal Detector Device* indicates coast is clear; as precaution, activate *Ultrasonic Dog Repeller*, which "instantly creates a safe zone up to 50 feet in front of you." Make it to vehicle. Grateful for *Battery Tender*—monitors voltage and keeps battery "ready to surge to life." Even on coldest days the *OT 810 Armored Halftrack* ("built post war in Czech Republic") starts right up.

Out the driveway. Time for one last check on spouse, kids, with help of *HomeGuard* home-confinement tracking unit—"the most advanced radio frequency monitoring system available." But wait—something's wrong. Getting jammed. Unbelievable. And there they go! Reach for *Flying Spider*. Too late. Howitzer rolls from garage. Swivels.

Should never have left that catalogue out. ▀

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THE AGENDA

ESSAYS THIS MONTH *on the midlife crisis as patriotic act; the education of Paul Wolfowitz; a barmy Nobel manifesto; the sybaritic life in Tatarstan; and more.*

DAVID BROOKS

"Anything worth doing stupidly is worth doing at great expense." PAGE 22

JONATHAN RAUCH

"Let's face it, voters are a nuisance. They have an inconvenient habit of refusing to follow where social reformers want to lead." PAGE 24

MARGARET TALBOT

"There's always one fertility doctor out there who will do anything, no matter how ethically dubious." PAGE 25

JAMES FALLOWS

"Wouldn't it be shameful, one of Rumsfeld's supporters put it to me, if we suffered an attack and knew that we could have done something about it?" PAGE 26

P. J. O'ROURKE

"Why do political bien-pensants automatically roll 'dispossessed,' 'poor,' and 'disenfranchised' together, as if they have a natural correlation—like 'ice,' 'cold,' and 'beer'?" PAGE 30

DAVID CARR

"Lipsky is responding to the darkest year in New York's history and the worst publishing economy in decades by launching a five-day-a-week newspaper." PAGE 33

JEFFREY TAYLER

"I found that I had a broad choice of entertainment venues in Tatarstan, none of which would have been to the Taliban's liking." PAGE 35

PETER LANDESMAN

"I told Aman that I was disturbed by the ease with which Pakistanis talk of nuclear war with India." PAGE 37

POKING THE WALRUS

A dubious political sport that neither party can resist

.....

After the first, brief (lovely) respite in years, politics returned to its usual rhythm early in January, with an address by Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle that set forth a new Democratic proposal for stimulating the economy: "a return to fiscal responsibility and a comprehensive new plan for economic growth ... a bill that boosts demand, encourages investment, and creates jobs ... two new ideas to try to get the economic-stimulus debate back on track ... a new jobs-creation tax credit ... a robust depreciation bonus ..."

I find it hard to take this kind of talk seriously, no matter which leader of which party it comes from. The idea of politicians stimulating the economy conjures up for me an unfortunate picture of small, anxious men (wearing white lab coats and looking like Woody Allen) poking and fiddling ("Let's stick a giant tax cut up here and see what happens") their way around some very large and somnolent creature (looking sort of like a giant walrus), with results that range from pathetic failure to disastrous success. I always think, *Oh, dear* (well, really it is more like *Oh, good*), *that big thing is just going to roll over on them and they are going to get hurt again.*

In fact, the last time they tried it, that is exactly what happened. This was only a few months ago, in December. Congressional Democrats and Republicans spent weeks arguing over competing approaches to economic stimulation but in the end could not agree enough to even begin the job, and had to quit and go home, blaming each other and looking silly. This sort

of failure is increasingly typical, and the reason, increasingly, is that failure is almost the point of the exercise.

The context of national politics since at least 1980 has been one of an ever closer struggle for primacy between the two major parties, neither of which has been able to manage a lasting superiority over the other. That struggle reached a wretched apex of sorts in the past presidential election, in which George W. Bush was elected by a narrow minority

of voters and Al Gore lost by a narrow majority of voters. Congressional elections that year cut the Republican margin in the House of Representatives to seven seats (out of 435) and left the Senate tied 50–50. The decision, last May, by Senator James M. Jeffords, of Vermont, to bolt the Republican Party and effectively (although not technically) join the Democratic caucus gave the Democrats control by a single seat. (Jeffords tells the story of what he calls his decision "to be true to what I thought was right" in the recently published and modestly titled *My Declaration of Independence*, described in the jacket copy as "a contemporary *Profiles in Courage*," which—at 136 small pages with the pronoun "I" appearing, I'd say, an average of two times per paragraph—sets a new publishing record for the inverse relationship between actual value and authorial self-satisfaction.)

The first effect of the increasing parity in party strength and in congressional representation has been a Congress that is not only equally divided but also controlled in each of its halves by absolutists. The seats that both par-

COMMENT
**MICHAEL
KELLY**

ties have lost over the past ten years, through elections, retirements, and party-controlled redistricting schemes, have in the main been the seats held by moderates in swing districts. The Republicans took Congress from the Democrats in 1994 by going after the vulnerable, and the Democrats spent the next three elections responding in kind, each time cutting back the Republican majority in the House.

What remains is a Congress purged of its center, a Congress where, as the congressional analyst Charlie Cook recently put it, “each party reflects its base constituencies, yet few members represent moderate center-left and center-right voters—the majority of American voters today.” Writing in *National Journal*, Cook went on to observe, “While an ideological diagram of the American electorate would probably look like a bell curve, a diagram of Congress—particularly the House, with its smaller, more homogenous districts—would look more like a camel with two humps.”

Moreover, a federally protected camel with two humps. Through the slaughter of the weak and years of gerrymandering swing districts out of existence, the parties have made a House composed almost entirely of safe seats. For at least half a century the reelection rate for incumbents has averaged above 90 percent; in the past two congressional elections a record 98 percent of House members were returned to office.

A Congress that is divided 50–50 and is 98 percent composed of members from districts dominated by one party naturally and necessarily falls apart fairly often—as in the case of the last failure to pass an economic-stimulus bill. Cook again: “As a result [of their ideological polarization] the two parties’ respective economic stimulus packages have come to resemble payoffs to their core constituencies and biggest financial backers ... and with neither side terribly mindful of swing

voters, the incentive to search for a consensus, to compromise on moderate proposals that might actually work, gets less and less.”

Actually, the problem is not only that neither side is terribly mindful of swing voters; it is also that both sides are terribly mindful of the only reliable voters they have left—the hard cores in their ever more ideologically coherent states and districts. To move these relatively few voters to care enough to make a difference for the very few gettable seats that remain, it helps to remind the faithful, frequently, of the great and awful differences between Our Side and The

Congressional Committee chairman, Tom Davis, of Virginia, in his response to Daschle: “Less than three weeks after single-handedly blocking economic-security legislation, Senator Daschle is taking advantage of his obstructionist tactics to score partisan political points.”

This is the conversation on which the Democrats are banking for success in 2002, especially if the economy stays soft in the second and third quarters. Democratic strategists find support for this approach in public-opinion surveys suggesting that in important political ways September 11 was not as much of a hinge moment as is often imagined.

Majorities of voters are still worried about their jobs, still want health-care reform, and so on. The idea of the Democrats as the party that wants to help in these regards and the Republicans as the party that wants to obstruct still has resonance.

The Democrats’ argument isn’t necessarily a bad one, but it is old, and old carries real risk here. September 11 did not change all things, but it did change a lot in politics. George Bush has the support of close to 90 percent of the voters; a solid majority rejects the view of him as an illegitimate or accidental or incompetent President. A strategy rooted in attacking Bush’s economic approach necessarily attacks

Bush, now not the split-court President but the wartime President. Moreover, Bush’s popularity reflects on his party, which is seen by more voters than before as better equipped for the important aspects of governance, including the economy—a reversal from the Clinton-Gingrich years.

But the greater risk is simply that the whole conversation feels beside the point—not as if the politico-economic stimulators of both parties are wrong, but as if they are purposely irrelevant, perversely out of touch: You’re still talking about *that*? Don’t you know there’s a war on? Leave that poor walrus alone.



Other. And for this purpose hardly anything is more helpfully defining than an argument over taxes and spending. For practical election-year purposes, the reason for poking the walrus is to poke the walrus—and point out what a terrible job the other fellows did when it was their turn to poke.

Thus Daschle in his January announcement: “A year ago we had the resources and the flexibility to make virtually any urgent investments we needed. We don’t have that flexibility or those resources today, because Republicans chose ideology over experience.”

And thus the National Republican

INSPIRED IMMATURITY

The midlife crisis as a patriotic duty

.....

I turned forty recently, so it's time I started planning my midlife crisis. I'm not going to have it right away, but something this humiliating requires preparation. First I've got to set some general parameters. For example, I envision something more dramatic than a red convertible but less drastic than a sex-change operation. I'm not inclined toward the Brian Wilson-style spend-three-years-in-bed crisis; on the other hand, I wouldn't want to go off soul-searching amid Tibetan Sherpas at a Himalayan base camp, which involves more physical exertion than I'm up for. I want to achieve the traditional goals of the midlife crisis—several acts of epic selfishness, maximum possible embarrassment to my children, maybe a hair weave—but I don't want to do anything that might cause my wife to cast meaningful glances at the butcher knives.

I face an additional challenge, in that my wife, while admitting that I am capable of causing embarrassment, doesn't think I have it in me to be phenomenally asinine. She thought I was pushing the limits of my daring when I came home from an unexpectedly long business trip with some European underwear. And she didn't worry in the least that I was merely warming up for grander things when she caught me listening to old Meat Loaf albums. She is going to be blown away when I come home one day on a new Harley-Davidson equipped with a front-mounted spud gun. When she sees me in possession of a weapon that can propel potatoes through plywood, maybe she will recognize the extent of my inner vitality.

One can't even think about a midlife crisis without heavy-duty financial planning, because it is an essential element of the American creed that anything worth doing stupidly is worth doing at great expense. Fortunately, in a little-noticed amendment to the 1997 Defense Authorization Bill, President Clinton and Dick Morris created tax-

deferred Second Adolescence Savings Accounts, which allow men to save up to \$2,000 a year tax free, as long as the money is eventually spent on something covered in chrome. With a few years of careful saving and several months of voracious credit-card accumulation, it should be possible to ensure full financial access to excess.

COMMENT **DAVID BROOKS**

The next step on the road to a midlife crisis is the most important one: deciding just what sort of crisis to have. Women have it easy. Their path is clear: 1) Visit the plastic surgeon to get cheek skin stapled behind head. 2) Go see *The Vagina Monologues*. 3) Pour some decaf and have a really meaningful conversation with a friend. But I am exploring the male point of view. Men have to choose between two basic types of midlife crises: the sensitive New Age spiritual quest and the vulgar materialist binge.

The New Age quest is for those who have a bias toward self-discovery techniques that are performed while barefoot. It suits men who believe that everyday life is full of trivial distractions and who want to discover inner joys and deep harmonies, which can then be used as fodder for self-adoring monologues before captive dinner-party audiences. The quest usually starts with a few afternoons in the spirituality section of the local bookstore. Several months of journal keeping, bread making, yoga classes, and suburban Buddhist epiphanies follow. Pretty soon Hermann Hesse novels begin to seem intelligent; the garage has been transformed into a pottery studio; the days start with chants to Eos, Goddess of the Dawn; and it seems like a good idea to grow a ponytail on the back of your head even though there's no hair left on top.

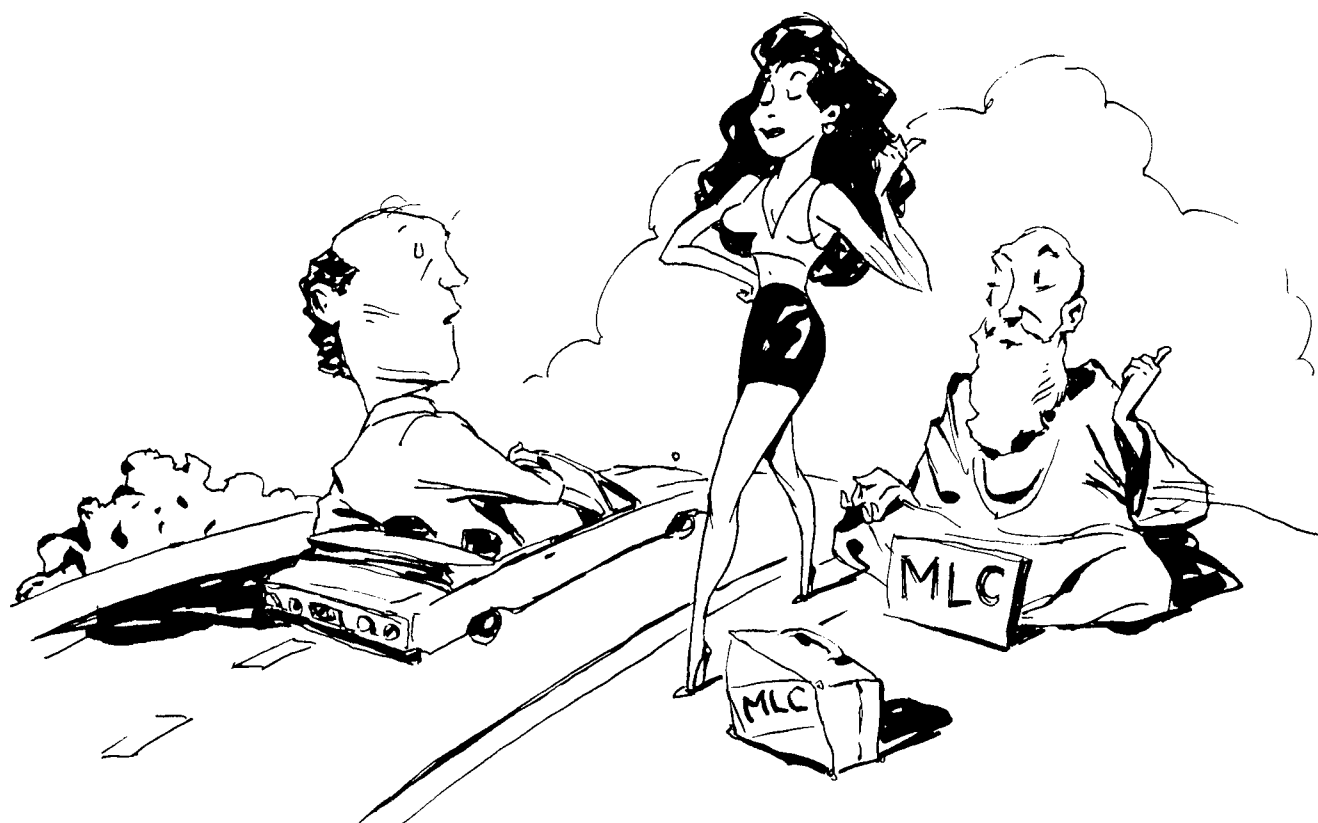
The spiritual midlife crisis is the near exclusive province of a certain kind of soft-spoken, upscale Democrat. Decibel-rich, upscale Republicans tend to opt for the vulgar materialist binge. This course is for those who realize that they finally have the money and the sta-

tus to do the raunchy things they could only dream of when they were young, awkward, poor, and unattractive. Up to now, the man on this course realizes, he has been too selfishly concerned with his career. Now he is going to be selfishly concerned with his pleasure.

The middle-aged hedonist usually starts small—a \$500 titanium Big Bertha-style golf club with a head the size of a small oil drum, or a set of wet-bar stools with seats made from the foreskins of endangered whales. But pretty soon he perceives that the priests and the philosophers have been suppressing a vital truth: Possessions *can* make you feel good. Money *can* buy happiness. It really is more fun to hang around superficial, fun-loving people who would be unnerved by the thought of having sex not in the presence of a video camera. From then on the path is obvious. One must have enough diamond-studded Bulgari watches to outfit a Saudi family. There is nothing wrong with using a Humvee as a golf cart. An hour spent experimenting with multi-channel surround-sound home theater/audio systems is an hour well spent. The middle-aged hedonist becomes a Jacuzzi connoisseur, an acolyte at the altar of the Mont-blanc pen. He experiences a surge of pleasure each time he lounges aboard his fifty-four-foot Chris-Craft wooden cruiser, taking cigar reviews seriously while sipping brandies three times as old as his date.

All of this can lead, of course, to only one place: Vegas. Pretty soon the hedonist will be sitting at the baccarat table in a low-cut pec-neck sweater and alligator loafers, failing to observe the distinction between witty banter with the cocktail waitress and sexual harassment. His skin will have that effervescent glow that Donald Trump's takes on in the presence of gilded metal and ceiling mirrors. He will radiate self-approval as he realizes that a life of unexamined smugness is really the only life worth living.

As for me, although I haven't decided which course I'll choose, I hope it will be something that will make the men around me privately envious



and sensible women publicly retch. And I want to make it clear that I will not be embarking on my crisis, whatever form it takes, for my own benefit. I'll be doing it for the good of society. America is suffering from a midlife-crisis crisis. The institution was vibrant in the 1970s: Woody Allen made a movie about his fantasy affair with a teenage Mariel Hemingway; Marin County was packed with paunchy pyramid worshippers; waterbeds seemed cool. But over the intervening years the very concept of a midlife crisis has come to seem passé, like Freud, fondue, and Swedish movies. Our last hope for national leadership in this area died when Bill Clinton left the White House. Our current President had a reverse midlife crisis, deciding at age forty to grow up. Now the most admired man in America goes to sleep at nine-thirty.

The biggest threat to the midlife crisis is the new era of seriousness. Wartime necessarily encourages a culture of earnestness. Nowadays, looking around the nation, one sees relatively little in the way of epic silliness. The dot-com jockeys have been tamed. The investment bankers seem relatively

chastened. College students are behaving sensibly. Young people seize career opportunities. Middle-aged people watch their cholesterol, and even the big rock groups, such as U2 and Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band, are ripe for Geritol sponsorship. We have entered an age of prudence.

All of this is troubling. For one thing, the continuing decline of the midlife crisis would destroy certain industries—think of the impact on men's necklaces alone. More important, without midlife crises our civilization will stagnate. There is a bogus Tocqueville quotation floating around out there (politicians like to cite it) to the effect that America is great because America is good. In truth, America is great because America is bad. Ours is the most vibrant nation on earth because it is the most childish, and therefore the most creative and daring. Over the years thousands of immature pioneers have dreamed dreams of incredible superficiality, and out of their dreams have come the institutions—rock music, Hollywood, message T-shirts—that helped to make this country what it is today. We neglect this spirit of inspired immaturity at our own peril.

Over the course of the past two hundred years Americans have vacillated between two great fears—fear of chaos and fear of conformity. During some periods we worried that individualistic energies would tear apart the bonds of community. During others we feared that our national élan was being enervated as we tamed our personalities in order to climb the corporate ladder and lead sensible, respectable lives.

Today conformity is once again a bigger threat than chaos. The forces of seriousness and maturity are everywhere closing in. If this trend continues, we will soon be living in a country unworthy of the greatness that was P. T. Barnum, our true Founding Father. It is up to the Boomers, and especially the male Boomers, to tap the well-spring of their own narcissism, and so unleash the testosterone-befogged dynamism that has always powered this nation to new and ever shallower realms of discovery. Some generations are called to war, some to pioneer new land; ours is called to stare adoringly at ourselves in resort hotel-room mirrors, while observing that from some angles our love handles really don't look that big.

DOES DEMOCRACY NEED VOTERS?

The question Europe still needs to answer

.....

The next time you see one of those newspaper photos of the industrialized world's top leaders at a summit meeting, you may notice something peculiar: one of the leaders in the photo is not an elected representative. Moreover, this unelected President speaks not for Russia—even Russia elects its President these days—but for Western Europe.

Let's face it, voters are a nuisance. They have an inconvenient habit of refusing to follow where social reformers want to lead. And so reformers are always on the prowl for ways to bypass electorates. One such effort is the increasingly audacious campaign by American lawyers and activists to circumvent legislatures with lawsuits. Another is the attempt to set up a number of supranational agencies, including an International Criminal Court, whose functionaries would not be accountable to voters anywhere. A third—and at least until lately the most ambitious of all such projects—is the European Union.

The EU is a consortium of European governments (fifteen at the moment) that for most of its forty-plus years has drifted steadily away from the moorings of good governance. A good government should be delimited in its powers, but the EU's guiding premise has been "ever closer union," leading to a permanent constitutional revolution that has inexorably gathered power toward the center. A good government should be comprehensible in its structure and open in its workings, but the EU's processes are bafflingly arcane, and many of its key deliberations are conducted behind closed doors. A good government should, above all, be accountable to voters in regular elections, but the EU has only one elected branch, which is by far its weakest: the parliament.

Those euro coins newly jangling in pockets across Europe? Only in a few countries were voters ever asked if they wanted their country to cede its monetary policy to a European central bank. Germany, where the central bank is based, gave up the deutschmark

against the wishes of its citizens. To the great architects of the EU (and some of them were great), voters were not assets and collaborators but pesky obstacles on the path toward the common continental good.

Europe's unprecedented and, it must be said, surprisingly successful effort to create a Europe-wide democracy without a Europe-wide electorate has finally hit a wall. The EU plans to admit twelve new members in the next few years. Getting the existing members to agree on anything is hard enough;

twelve new ones may cause total paralysis. Prompted by this realization, an especially prominent critic has recently pointed out many of the shortcomings delineated above, charging that the EU's citizens "feel that deals are all too often cut out of their sight," that they believe "the Union is behaving too bureaucratically," and that the EU "needs to become more democratic, more transparent and more efficient." This critic is none other than the EU itself, which made these points in a formal declaration in December and announced plans for a convention, starting this month and continuing into next year, to draft a constitution for Europe.

Americans may yawn. During a war on terrorism, who can be bothered with "qualified majority voting," "subsidiarity," "variable geometry," and the other tongue-twisting and brain-addling elements of the EU apparatus? Besides, no one would be surprised if a grandiose EU parley disintegrates into diplomatic pablum.

But the new convention looks to be different. Its mandate is sweeping, putting on the table everything from the Union's basic division of powers with its member states to the direct election of an EU President. It will consult a wide range of real people—national parliamentarians, academics, members of private groups, business leaders—in addition to the usual coteries of EU ministers and bureaucrats. Above all, it is impelled by Europeans' realization that today's blob

needs shape and limits if it is to grow without collapsing.

The EU can take on a host of new members, or it can become more democratic and open, or it can become more streamlined and efficient; to do all three at once, however, seems impossible. The EU's constitutional convention, in short, faces a hopeless task—just as our own constitutional convention did in 1787. I wouldn't bet that the talks will produce a turning point in Western history. But I wouldn't write off the possibility either.

Americans ought to take an interest in the EU's constitutional deliberations, because core American interests are involved. One is stability in Europe: the United States has long favored the EU's eastward expansion as a way to knit Europe together and prevent chaos or war. America also has an important principle to defend. The EU has a common market, a common currency, a common high court, a (mostly) common border and immigration policy, and more; it is moving toward a common foreign policy and even a common military force. However one feels about these supranational structures, they are unlikely to be undone—so they must be made accountable. An opaque and inadequately democratic EU will alienate its citizens and ultimately destabilize itself; it will dither when it should act and act when it should dither; it will be tugged to the left of its citizenry by the activists and intellectuals who dominate Europe's elite; and it will denude the democratic legacy that millions of Europeans and Americans have died to bestow.

I asked a British Europhile recently if America has any role to play in Europe's constitutional debate. "Not really," he said. "If the Americans try to tell the Europeans how to run their institutions, the Europeans get very annoyed." On reflection he tempered his reaction; but many Europeans, especially those of the French persuasion, will share his initial response, and understandably so. The Bush Administration and other American busybodies will need to be delicate about butting in to the EU's constitutional debate. But butt in we should, with quiet diplomacy and friendly speechifying. America has a vital stake not just in widening the EU but in opening it, too.

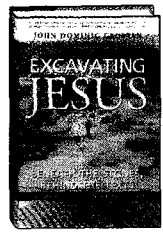
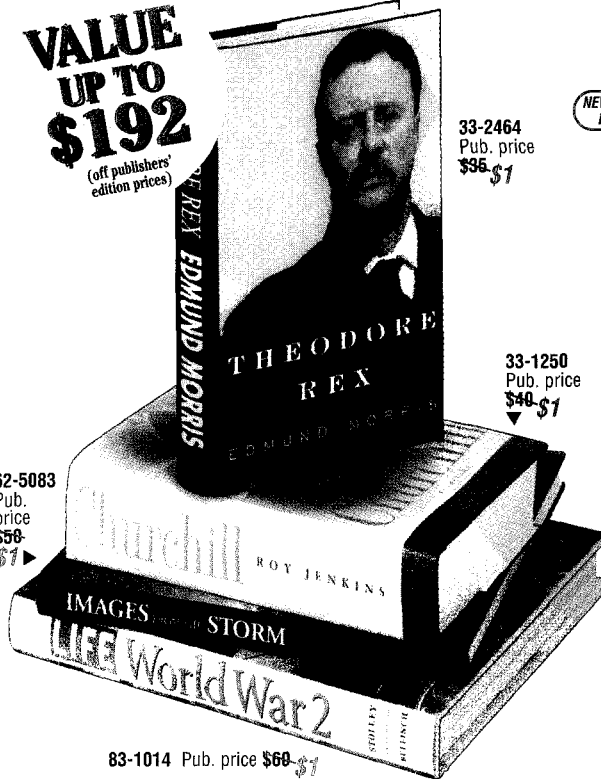
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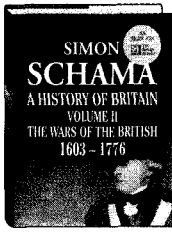
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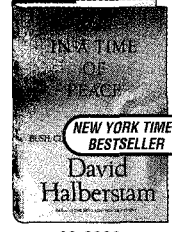


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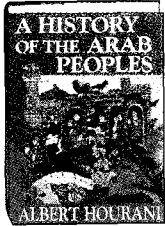
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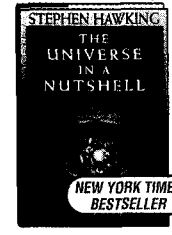
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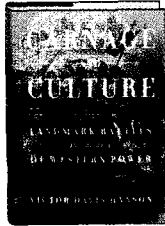


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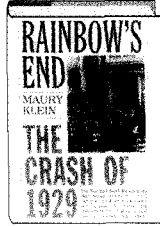


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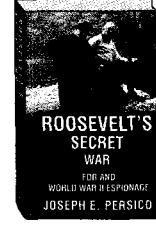


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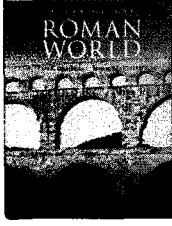


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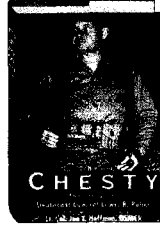


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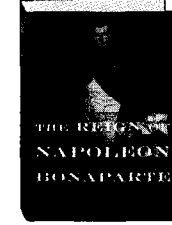


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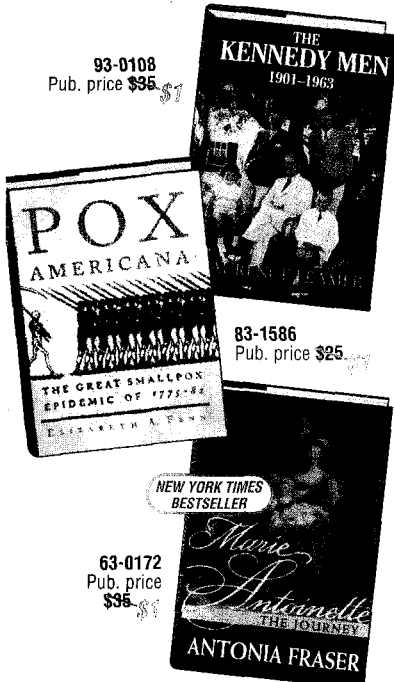
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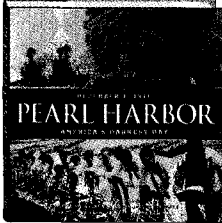
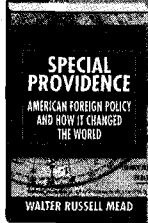
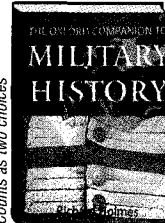
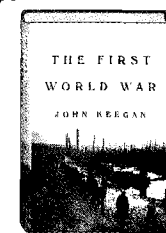
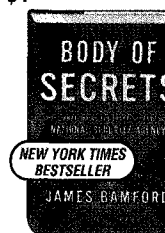
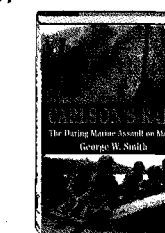
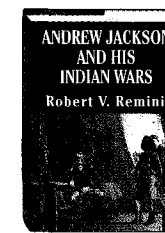
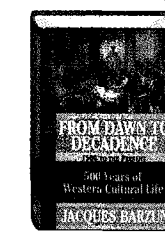
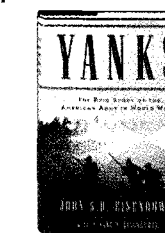
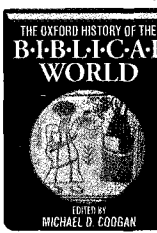
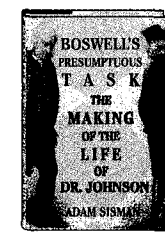
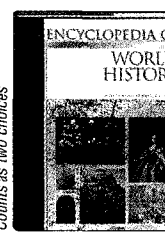


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The era of consumer-driven eugenics has begun

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There are things about one's life and especially about one's children that cannot be known in advance and to which it would be foolish to assume a right outcome or a wrong one. How, for example, could you possibly know whether you and your family would be better off having had a boy child and then a girl, or a girl first, or two girls or two boys? What would your standard for comparison be? Which child would you have given up in order to have had the imaginary right family? You might have thought you wanted a girl, and then gotten one not at all like the girl you expected—not gentle, not Barbie-doll loving, utterly unlike your childhood self. You might have thought that having one child of each sex was perfect, and then found that family harmony eluded you nonetheless. Certainly, the more precise your expectations of your children and the more convinced you are that those expectations can be met (indeed, that you deserve to have them met), the more disappointed you are likely to be. Without some humility in the face of the unknown and unknowable—without some fundamental willingness to accept and to love whatever child you get—parenthood would be a very different, and a lesser, thing.

One might think that all this would be obvious to anyone who was ever part of a family, or read a novel about one. But in an era when people can shop, online, for sperm and egg donors of specified height and hair texture and IQ—in an era, in other words, of consumer-driven, privatized eugenics—it's easy to forget about what we cannot control or predict. In this environment radical reproductive technologies tend to slide into use when someone wants them and can pay. There's always at least one fertility doctor out there who will do anything, no matter how risky or ethically dubious. Religious absolutists fume; free-market purists and biotech groupies celebrate; and the rest of us scratch our heads, troubled by a vague sense that something's wrong here.

For several years now clients of an infertility clinic called The Genetics and IVF Institute, in Fairfax, Virginia, have had access to a sperm-sorting technique that allows them to choose—with about 90 percent reliability for girls and 73 for boys—the sex of their child. Some people use this service to avoid passing on serious diseases that can be inherited

only by boys. But most use it for what might be called social or aesthetic reasons: they think one child of each sex makes for the ideal family; they have particular goals for

their children, which they imagine are best fulfilled by one sex or the other. For these customers the Genetics and IVF Institute has a principle: it's called "family balancing," and it means that institute doctors will do the procedure only for people who already have one or more children of one sex and want a child of the opposite sex. This is supposed to be an answer to the charge of gender discrimination, the charge that by offering this service they are catering to people who value one sex over the other—people like the parents in India and China who have substantially upset the balance of the sexes in some regions by aborting (categorically undesirable) female fetuses. But because most of the clients using the sperm-sorting method presumably did not use it the first time around (and therefore had to take whatever they got), there's no guarantee that they do not value one sex over the other.

Still, the problem with this method, as far as some people are concerned, is not that it is being marketed at all but that it is not quite accurate enough. A more sophisticated, fail-safe method of sex selection uses pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD)—a procedure by which embryos created outside the body can be tested for certain genetic disorders before they are transferred to the uterus. In this case, sex is treated as a disease—something to be screened for, like Huntington's chorea or cystic fibrosis. Clients can pick a boy or girl embryo and discard the rest. The Genetics and IVF Institute

is already offering PGD for family balancing, but quietly; neither their Web site nor their literature mentions it.

This use of PGD had a brief airing in the news last September, when an enterprising fertility doctor named Norbert Gleicher sought the blessing of the American Society of Reproductive Medicine to start offering this service. John Robertson, the acting chair of the ASRM ethics committee, gave the go-ahead, but a small flap ensued when it transpired that Robertson had acted on his own. This proved slightly embarrassing for the ASRM, which had in 1999 issued a statement discouraging the use of PGD for sex selection on the grounds that it undercut the "acceptance of offspring for themselves and not their nonessential characteristics" and that fertility treatment posed "health risks and burdens" and should not be undertaken whimsically. But the truth is that the ASRM ethical pronouncements lacked teeth, and there is no other regulatory body equipped to stop sex selection—or almost any other gene-shopping innovation.

The real trouble with sex selection goes beyond sex discrimination. The real trouble is that it allows us, for the first time, to use a medical procedure to select or reject a child on the basis of a characteristic that has nothing to do with life and death, that is not in any sense of the word pathological, that cannot possibly be construed as sparing a child any pain and suffering. It might sound harmless enough, maybe even kind of cute—this impulse to pick and choose, pink or blue. But if we allow people to select a child's sex, then there really is no barrier to picking embryos—or, ultimately, genetically programming children—based on any whim, any faddish notion of what constitutes superior stock. This time the old and overused accusation would actually be true: we would be playing God—and none too well, in all likelihood, given how little we really know about what makes individual human beings the way they are. A world in which people (wealthy people, anyway) can custom-design human beings unhampered by law or social sanction is not a dystopian sci-fi fantasy any longer but a realistic scenario. It is not a world most of us would want to live in.

COMMENT
**MARGARET
TALBOT**

THE UNILATERALIST

A conversation with Paul Wolfowitz

.....

Soldiers wear ribbons on their uniforms to signal where they have been and what they have done. People in Washington use photographs of themselves with famous officials. The typical lawyer's or lobbyist's office is decorated with trophy photos, on what has come to be known as the "I love me" wall. People who have worked in White House jobs often display pictures of themselves with the President in parts of their homes that guests will see.

The waiting room of Paul Wolfowitz's office at the Pentagon has half a dozen pictures on the wall—Wolfowitz with the elder George Bush in 1991, during the Gulf War; Wolfowitz with Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. The newest and most interesting photo shows a grinning Wolfowitz with Donald Rumsfeld on one side and Dick Cheney on the other. Across the bottom is scrawled "Paul—Who is the best Secretary of Defense you ever worked for? Dick." The joke is that both the men flanking him are Defense Secretaries he has worked for. Wolfowitz is now the deputy secretary of defense, No. 2 in the Pentagon under Rumsfeld. During the Gulf War, when Cheney held Rumsfeld's current job, Wolfowitz was an undersecretary there.

The Washington message the photo conveys is that Wolfowitz is well connected and that his relationship with Cheney is close enough for a bantering inscription rather than "Thanks for your service to our nation!" But the photo seems worth noting for a less obvious reason: these three people really are a team, whose shared instincts and beliefs are of critical importance in the management of the war on terrorism.

Early in his time as President, Bill Clinton used to refer to "the conversation"—the ongoing discussions he'd had since the late 1960s with his wife and dozens of policy-minded friends about education, welfare, the Democratic Party's future, and so on. Any governor becoming President is ill prepared in certain ways, but on the topics they had long

discussed the Clinton team did, as Clinton liked to point out, have a head start.

It is hard to imagine Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld, or Cheney using a term as self-conscious as "the conversation," but for thirty years they and several associates have been developing and applying the world view that mainly guides this war. Those associates include Richard

WASHINGTON
DESK

**JAMES
FALLOWS**

Perle and Kenneth Adelman, who served in the Reagan Administration, and James Woolsey, a Democrat who was Bill Clinton's first CIA director. All three, from outside the Administration, have

strongly made a case for carrying the anti-terrorist war to Iraq. The men inside the Administration are so familiar with one another's views, instincts, limitations, and strengths that they have been able to swing into wartime action with remarkably few blunders or amateurish moments.

Within the Administration there are still genuine disagreements about the next step, and the ultimate steps, in the war against terrorism. To those on the Rumsfeld team, the advantages of moving against Saddam Hussein in Iraq seem obvious—whether or not he can be directly linked to the September 11 attacks. The risk of letting his regime continue to develop chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons of mass destruction is too great. Political approval for a pre-emptive strike against terrorism can only diminish as time goes on—unless, of course, the United States suffers another devastating attack. Iraq's vaunted Republican Guard proved to be much less fearsome than advertised during the Gulf War; in the decade since then it has only grown weaker and American forces more powerful. Wouldn't it be shameful, one of Rumsfeld's supporters put it to me, if we suffered an attack and *knew* that we could have done something about it?

The counterargument, advanced mainly by Colin Powell and others in the State Department, is for a more methodical and cautious approach.

Members of this camp are alarmed about the practical realities of a war in Iraq, where there is no counterpart to the Northern Alliance to do the actual fighting; they see more value in building an international alliance against Saddam Hussein. But the operating skill of the Rumsfeld team has become a policy argument in itself, and if the United States attacks Saddam Hussein, it will be largely because the Pentagon team has bolstered U.S. credibility through its competence.

At fifty-eight, Wolfowitz is much older than Cheney or Rumsfeld was when running the Pentagon. (Cheney, who was Gerald Ford's chief of staff in his early thirties, became Secretary of Defense in the first Bush Administration at age forty-eight; Rumsfeld will turn seventy this year, but at forty-three he was the youngest-ever Defense Secretary, in the Ford Administration.) Yet Wolfowitz still has the air of a promising brainy student being groomed for great things. A character in Saul Bellow's novel *Ravelstein* (2000) is based on him; the novel is a roman à clef portrait of Allan Bloom, a mentor to Wolfowitz during his graduate studies at the University of Chicago. "It's only a matter of time before Phil Gorman has cabinet rank, and a damn good thing for the country," the Bloom character says, referring to the Wolfowitz character. "He has a powerful mind and a real grasp of great politics, this kid."

Wolfowitz, like Prince Charles, remains "this kid" partly because his elders are still filling the jobs ahead of him, but principally because of his bearing. He is serious-minded but not pompous or puffed up. Like Donald Rumsfeld, he looks comparatively young for his age; the film-actor version would be James Mason.

Cheney and Rumsfeld are two of the notable all-rounders in modern appointive politics, and Wolfowitz, too, has been well prepared for high office. He has held three jobs in the Pentagon and three in the State Department, and he worked in the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (now part of the State Department) during the U.S.-Soviet arms-limitation talks. During the Carter

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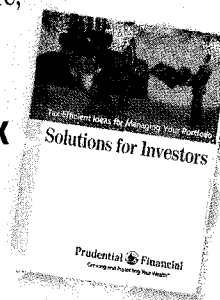
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Administration, when most of the government viewed the Shah of Iran as an island of stability in the turbulent Middle East, Wolfowitz led a Pentagon team that issued a prescient warning of upheaval in Iran. When Reagan arrived, Wolfowitz directed the East Asia office in the State Department, where he played a large role in swinging American support away from Ferdinand Marcos's regime in the Philippines. Then he was ambassador to Indonesia—a Jewish ambassador who was highly popular in the country with the world's largest (and perhaps least fanatic) Muslim population. I visited him in Jakarta near the end of his term. He was a genuine celebrity there, in part because his wife, Clare, who had been a high school exchange student in Indonesia, is an academic expert on Javanese language and culture. (The two are now divorced.) After that he was a crucial part of the original Gulf War team in the Pentagon.

In January, I talked with Wolfowitz under the watchful eye of Torie Clarke, the director of the Pentagon's press office, who kept glancing at her watch and finally said, "This is very interesting, but ..." Given Wolfowitz's Clintonlike relish for the twists of an issue, this meant he was about an answer and a half into our conversation by the time our appointment was over. But, like Clinton, he had been chastised by friends for letting meetings turn into bull sessions and thus destroy his schedule, so he had learned to obey his timekeepers.

I wanted to ask about the evolution of the view that now guided the war. That view, as I understood it, was defined by pessimism, optimism, and impatience with procedure.

The pessimism lies in an insistence that the world is full of enemies who will hurt us if they can. This view is widespread in America since September 11. It was not before then—and the proof is the appetite for "Why do they hate us?" stories. Wolfowitz, I had been told by members of his camp, was less surprised by the attack than the public, because his formative experience was confronting the Soviet Union. Kenneth Adelman, who directed the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency in the

Reagan years, told me, "I used to remind myself during the arms talks that if it was up to Karpov [his Soviet counterpart], I'd be in a gulag. When all is said and done, there really are people on the opposite side from us." Wolfowitz extended this view in several essays, including one in *The National Interest* in 1997 in which he compared the prosperity, optimism, and predictions of "global civilization" of the late 1990s to the very similar worldwide climate a century before, and warned that the risk of tragedy was just as great now.

The optimism lies in the conviction that if the United States confronts "evil" enemies, it can win. The proof is, of course, the Soviet Union's fall. Ronald Reagan came to office calling not for détente but for outright victory over the "evil empire." Ten years later the empire was gone. Nearly all the members of today's defense leadership were part of Reagan's team. The memory of that success lies behind George W. Bush's promises that terrorists will be not just contained, like drug traffickers, but beaten, like Nazis and Soviets.

As for impatience with procedure, around the world the Bush foreign-policy team is criticized as "unilateralist"—a group that scoffs at alliances and international organizations and doesn't take treaties seriously. To people who share Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld's views, these criticisms reflect a confusion of ends and means. If arms-control talks simply continue the arms race, these people think, then it's time to step away from the table. As long as the United Nations or NATO goes in the general direction the United States thinks wise, we should act through those alliances. But humoring allies counts for little in itself, and negotiating for its own sake has no appeal. The NATO countries complained when Ronald Reagan put intermediate-range missiles in Europe, and they complained when Bill Clinton took them out. The members of the current defense team "have made their careers by not being taken in by atmospherics or diplomatic niceties, not being deceived by lulls in the action," says Jay Winik, the author of *April 1865* (2001), whose previous book, *On the Brink* (1996), was about the conservative national-security es-

tablishment. "The whole nature of this terrorist war is that something terrible happens, and then it stops, and then something terrible happens again. In a very strong sense they are temperamentally right for this challenge."

I asked Wolfowitz about the experiences that had been most important in shaping his own strategic view. He sat and looked away for a long time. Then he talked about his early work at the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

"It's funny, if there's one thing that really separates my generation from the next generation, it's the Cuban missile crisis," he said. "People who lived through that can see the world in a certain way that people who didn't live through it can't, I guess. But one of the things that impressed me in the three years I worked on [arms control] was that nuclear wars are most likely to arise out of conventional wars. Preventing conventional war is the key, I came to think—even more important than simply looking at nuclear weapons in a vacuum. That actually led me to grab on very eagerly when I had the chance a few years later to come here [the Pentagon] for the first time."

Some politicians, such as George W. Bush and Ted Kennedy, are hard to quote directly because they don't finish their sentences. Wolfowitz is hard to quote directly because so many of his sentences have numerous internal clauses, like mathematical formulas with brackets. He went on to explain how his immersion in conventional power politics led him to realize that to conduct foreign policy, one must first know who one's allies are.

"You *do* have to treat your friends different from your enemies," he said. "I think that's a basic principle of international relations—and a lot of the rest of life, except in life you don't usually have enemies quite as nasty as you do in foreign policy."

During his time as an Asia hand Wolfowitz was known for applying pressure to "friends"—Ferdinand Marcos, the Korean generals—to encourage democratic reforms. What about applying that kind of pressure to the "friendly" dictators and tribesmen who are



supporting us now? He said, "Well, first of all let's talk about the nondemocratic *enemies*. The fact is that all the regimes that sponsor terrorism terrorize their own people. For reasons that aren't obvious, we've tended—not just the United States but the world in general—to give a pass to, for example, the Syrian dictatorship that we never gave the South Korean dictatorship. I'm not saying that the South Koreans should have had it—but you sort of wonder at the ready acceptance of this kind of pass."

He said he really couldn't explain the double standard. But one reality was that through the 1980s "success built on success" in Asia as countries overthrew dictatorships, whereas in the Middle East "you might say failure has built on failure," with no examples of democratic reform like the ones in the Philippines, Korea, and Taiwan. "Also, if you stop and think about the penalties for being known to favor any kind of positive political change in, say, Iraq, it's not surprising that there are a million Iraqis who favor positive political change—and they're all outside of Iraq. Inside, you don't survive."

He thought that this pass system was about to change. "There has been ... not tolerance but lack of intolerance toward support for terrorism until now," he said. "We had these terrorism lists, and countries were put on them for supporting terrorism. It was a bad thing to do, but it wasn't considered in-

tolerable. I think that after September 11 it's intolerable. It seems to me that the political condition of the Muslim world and the Arab world was considered tolerable before. Not very nice, but you live with it. And I think that's not healthy—not healthy for us and certainly not healthy for them. Terrorists [and dictators] don't operate in a vacuum. They look at what happens to other terrorists. And hopefully now they are looking at what's happened to the people in Afghanistan. We're clearly getting very different responses from the Yemenis, for example, than we did a couple of months ago."

Part of changing the attitude toward terrorism, he said, is making sure that military action gets results. "It is important that you don't just think of military force as a way of 'signaling' things," he said. "I get very, very uncomfortable the minute we say we're going to 'send a message' with this or that use of military power. I find this funny coming sometimes from people whose formative experience was opposing the Vietnam War, which I would have thought would give them greater caution about it. You send a military message by having a military *effect*. We could have bombed Afghanistan for months and months and not sent any 'message' if we hadn't found a way, largely through getting Special Forces on the ground to coordinate air strikes, to make the air power devastating in its military effect."

The obvious question was how Wolfowitz viewed the Vietnam War at the time. But Torie Clarke and her associate Susan Wallace got me out before I could ask him, and he had no time for a follow-up e-mail exchange. The prevailing view of Vietnam among his colleagues is that it couldn't be fought effectively, because it was an attempt to fine-tune military efforts rather than go out and win. Therefore it was not worth fighting.

As I was leaving, I did manage to ask whether Wolfowitz, who a year before taking office had written in *Commentary* that a new round of "great-power conflict" would be the main threat to future peace, thought this was still true. He said he did.

A century ago, he said, the international problem was the appearance of new great powers—mainly Germany and Japan—whose appetites and grievances the existing world order could not accommodate. Now another crop of new powers was appearing.

"China is the most obvious one," he said. "In East Asia in general you have this stunning growth in economic power, which means ultimately, potentially, military power. A unified Korea is itself the size of a major European power. Only in Asia does Vietnam look like a small country—its army is tough and big. And then you've got the Indians ... It's a question of how to achieve balance of power in East Asia, among these growing powers, without going through the experience Europe went through to get there, because that's a little too costly."

Russia, the familiar "great power," would not be part of the new problem—"not at all, no," he said. "During the Cold War we were trying, with the opening to China, to help a weak China deal with a threat from a very powerful Soviet Union. I think in the future we may be trying to figure out how to help a weak Russia deal with an increasingly powerful China. I think we really are in a new era in U.S.-Russian relations. It will go through bumps and starts, and it's not a new era in the sense that suddenly they love us and we love them. But our interests coincide in so many ways that they didn't before." With that he was back to the current war.



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NOBEL SENTIMENTS

Pious thoughts from wise fools

.....

To mark the hundredth anniversary of the Nobel Prize, last December, Francis Crick, Nadine Gordimer, and José Saramago, "in consultation with an extensive group of Nobel prize winners," as the press release put it, issued a call to ... do something or other. The statement was signed by 103 Nobel laureates. It is printed in full below, with parenthetical exegesis by someone too dumb ever to get a Nobel, or even a MacArthur genius grant.

The most profound danger to world peace in the coming years will stem not from the irrational acts of states or individuals but from the legitimate demands of the world's dispossessed.

("Irrational" is an interesting word choice. Aren't Nobel Prize winners supposed to understand how rationalization works? Maybe they mean "bad.")

Of these poor and disenfranchised ...

(Why do political *bien-pensants* automatically roll "dispossessed," "poor," and "disenfranchised" together, as if they have a natural correlation—like "ice," "cold," and "beer"? The Dalai Lama [Peace Prize 1989] is dispossessed. My parish priest is poor. And Alan Greenspan, as a resident of the District of Columbia, is ineligible to vote in congressional elections.)

... the majority live a marginal existence in equatorial climates. Global warming, not of their making but originating with the wealthy few, will affect their fragile ecologies most.

(Did you see that global warming coming out of left field? Anyway, blaming the onset of earth-is-toast on the "wealthy few" seems a tad unscientific for a document that is signed by sixty-five recipients of Nobels in chemistry and physics. The earth had temperature cycles when the wealthy few were lucky trilobites with extra-rich muck to frolic in. And how are we going to solve the problems of those who "live a marginal existence in equatorial climates" such as that of Washington, D.C., if we don't

produce more of the industrial prosperity that boils their weather? It's going to take a bunch of Nobel laureates to figure that out. Or not.)

Their situation will be desperate and manifestly unjust.

(Nice verb tense. In Congo, Haiti, Cambodia, and Rwanda their situation right now is ...?)

AT LARGE

**P.J.
O'ROURKE**

It cannot be expected, therefore, that in all cases they will be content to await the beneficence of the rich.

(I won't make a wisecrack about "cannot be expected ... to await the beneficence of the rich." Specifically, I won't make the wisecrack "and should go get a job." This would be "manifestly unjust" to the hardworking poor—and dispossessed and disenfranchised—people of the world. Besides, if they got a job, it would worsen global warming.)

If, then, we permit the devastating power of modern weaponry to spread through this combustible human landscape, we invite a conflagration that can engulf both rich and poor.

(Oh, I don't know. We just did that in Afghanistan, and so far it's working pretty well.)

The only hope for the future lies in cooperative international action legitimized by democracy.

(We just did that, too—albeit Great Britain and Russia were almost the only other countries to cooperate without arm-twisting. Russia is sort of a democracy, isn't it?)

It is time to turn our backs on the unilateral search for security, in which we seek to shelter behind walls.

(A good point. Walls collapse. On the other hand, concrete barriers that keep car bombs from being parked too close to public buildings are useful. So are baggage screening and opening the mail with ski mittens on and maybe a missile shield.)

Instead we must persist in the quest for united action to counter global warming and a weaponised world.

("Weaponise" is my favorite modern verb. The pen is mightier than the sword—until you try to weaponise your ballpoint to fight a man who has a saber. Then your head gets sliced off.)

These twin goals will constitute vital components of stability as we move towards the wider degree of social justice that alone gives hope of peace.

(I thought "cooperative international action legitimized by democracy" was "the only hope." But I guess Nobel laureates, like anybody else, are entitled to change their minds. So "social justice" it is. However, you'd expect Nobel laureates to think this thing through. Divide the gross domestic product of the world by the world's population, and everyone could receive \$7,200 a year. What kind of basketball are we going to get if Shaquille O'Neal has to take a \$21,422,800 pay cut? And a family of four in Tanzania making \$28,800 is going to buy a used Toyota, which brings us back to global warming.)

Some of the needed legal instruments are already at hand, such as the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the Convention on Climate Change, the Strategic Arms Reduction treaties, and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

(And don't forget the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the League of Nations Charter, and the Oslo accords.)

As concerned citizens ...

(The rest of us aren't worried at all.)

... we urge all governments to commit to these goals that constitute steps on the way to the replacement of war by law.

(As in the Nuremberg Laws, the Jim Crow laws, South Africa's apartheid code, whatever legal gimcrackery Stalin used to prop up his show trials.)

To survive in the world we have transformed, we must learn to think in a new way.

(They said it. I didn't.)

As never before, the future of each depends on the good of all.

(No—other way around. The future of all depends on the self-interested good of each. Adam Smith did a lot of work in *The Wealth of Nations* showing this to be the case. *The Wealth of Nations*, Book 1, Chapter 2: "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own



interest." Although Adam Smith may have been a little right of center to win a Nobel. Also, he was dead.)

To sum up, here we have a statement beginning with a thesis that had been disproved before it was uttered and ending with a palpable untruth. The logic meanders. The ideas are banal. The text exhibits a remarkable prolixity, considering that it's only 284 words long. Is this the best that 103 Nobel Prize winners can do?

Of course, it's always tempting to make fun of the Nobels. (Sidelight: Alfred Nobel owed his wealth not only to the invention of dynamite [vid. "combustible human landscape," above] but also to investment in his brothers' successful exploration for oil in Azerbaijan [vid. "combustible human landscape," above].) Making fun is especially tempting to those of us who will receive invitations to Stockholm only in the form of brochures from Scandinavian cruise-ship lines. Let me give in to temptation.

Ernest Hemingway but not James Joyce? Toni Morrison but not John Updike? Dario Fo? Selma Ottilia Lovisa Lagerlöf? (She wrote *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*, a fanciful account of a young boy's travels across Sweden on the back of a goose.) And allow me to be the millionth person to point out that among the Nobel Peace Prize winners are Yasir Arafat, Shimon Peres, Henry Kissinger, Le Duc Tho, and International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. ("If the mushroom cloud doesn't clear up, call me in the morning.") For all I know, the lists of prizewinners in physics, chem-

istry, medicine, and economics are just as wack. I'm not competent to judge. Although the Cambridge University professor Brian Josephson (Physics 1973) says, "There is a lot of evidence to support the existence of telepathy." And a co-discoverer of DNA, James Watson (Medicine 1962), is, at age seventy-three, researching the effects of sunshine on sex drive.

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screw-ups notwithstanding, Nobel Prize winners are smarter than we are. And Nobel Prize winners are doubtless as morally alert as we are. Even the Peace Prize winners are probably, on average, decent people. I scanned the list of hundredth-anniversary-statement signatories and didn't notice anyone in obvious need of a swift kick—the possible exception being the statement co-author José Saramago (Literature 1998), a Portuguese Communist who wrote a novel, *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, in which Jesus tries to get out of being crucified and sleeps with Mary Magdalene. Henry Kissinger and Yasir Arafat did not apply their John Hancocks.

A hundred and three Nobel laureates have provided us with counsel on the political and social future of the world. Any such advice must be worth listening to, and I guess that includes the advice they've given us this time. But where are the words that stir men's souls? That turn their hearts? That change their minds? Where is the "We hold these truths to be self-evident ..."? Where is even the "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs"? For that matter, where is the "Where's the beef?"

Perhaps the Nobel laureates' statement should be understood as an indictment of our age. We could be living in an era so stupid that even the most intelligent among us are cement-heads. Possibly the statement is simple proof, if proof were needed, that nothing good ever comes out of a committee. But maybe the statement contains a deeper message. Maybe the laureates are speaking, more powerfully than they realize, for radical democratization and perfect egalitarianism. Nothing in their statement indicates that the opinions of common men are worse or more foolish than the opinions of Nobel Prize winners. Let us have our international actions truly "legitimized by democracy." When it comes to questions of "What is to be done?" (to quote Lenin, as José Saramago might do), let's ask any old person. Let's ask Mom. Mom says, "Global warming or no global warming, it's still winter. Wear a hat."



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THE BIRTH OF THE SUN

*New York is littered with the carcasses of failed newspapers.
What are the chances for the latest upstart?*

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On the chilly last day of a very bad year in Lower Manhattan, Seth Lipsky headed into an office building on the corner of Church and Chambers and took an elevator to the second floor. The space, which Lipsky inspected with his colleague Ira Stoll, was in the midst of a build-out, with aluminum rails marking spaces that would soon be inhabited by employees of their nascent business. In the midst of the dot-com boom the scene would have been typical to the point of cliché: proprietor of a much anticipated new enterprise walks through unfinished downtown office space trailing his loyal sidekick, etching the future as construction proceeds.

But Lipsky is not reprising a dot-com reverie. A man who wears a hat, favors well-worn trench coats, and writes out messages with a ball-point pen is hardly an avatar of new technology. He's responding to the darkest year in New York's history and the worst publishing economy in decades by launching a five-day-a-week newspaper, the *New York Sun*, in a move so ill-timed and audacious that it leaves even some of Lipsky's investors hard put to describe the risks. A journalist who was encouraged to leave his position as editor of *The Forward*, a Jewish-centric weekly, after its board tired of his unrelenting conservatism (and his steady push to make the weekly a daily), Lipsky will be up against three well-funded dailies, two of which—the *New York Post* and the *Daily News*—lose gobs of money every year.

Lipsky, a free-market absolutist who occupies the far reaches of the far right, believes that there's room in the city for a daily that isn't afflicted, as he sees it, by the genetic liberalism of *The New York Times*. His strategy, which calls for a metro-focused broadsheet with a single section that will run no more than twenty pages daily, to be circulated Monday through Friday at around 20,000 or 25,000 copies, probably will not worry the Sulzbergers much. But it would be silly to dismiss the effort. Lipsky is not a

frivolous man. He assisted in the development of the Asian and European editions of *The Wall Street Journal*, and he took what had been a tiny Yiddish-language weekly to English-language prominence. "He understands the dynamics of publishing, and he will be more aware of the risks than anybody else," says Peter Kann, the publisher of *The Wall Street Journal* and Lipsky's longtime friend. "He will have thought them through. I think it has a reasonable chance of financial success, and I'm certain it will be an artistic success."

Under Lipsky, *The Forward* published a number of important scoops: the discovery, when Lani Guinier was a Clinton nominee, of Guinier's legal writing in support of what critics saw as racially based quotas; the revelation that Hillary Clinton had a Jewish step-grandparent; and the fact that many Jews were finally about to recover property and money lost in the Holocaust. These stories, produced by a hardy young group of reporters, were followed up by major newspapers at the time.

But Lipsky drove the historically progressive Forward Association meshuga with right-field editorializing on such hobbyhorses as the benefits of tax cuts, the pitfalls of the Arab-Israeli peace process, and the status of Ronald Reagan as one of the nation's most accomplished Presidents. He was finally forced to resign in 2000. Lipsky then started putting together \$15 million from a team of eleven investors that includes Michael Steinhardt, a retired money manager and a former member of the Democratic Leadership Council with a long interest in Jewish affairs; Roger Hertog, a vice-chair of Alliance Capital Management, the chair of the Manhattan Institute, and a trustee at the American Enterprise Institute; and Lord Black of Crossharbour, the chair and CEO of Hollinger International, which owns the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *Jerusalem Post*, and the *Daily Telegraph* of London, among other papers. It's one measure of the bereft state

of the Web that a group of men seeking a bit of Manhattan mindshare feel they have to plunk broadsheet pages onto New York's streets. And just in case a new New York daily doesn't make the money disappear efficiently enough, Steinhardt and Hertog are, as of this writing, negotiating an agreement to assume two-thirds ownership of *The New Republic*, the Washington political weekly known for generating lots of interesting ideas and very little profit. Steinhardt knows what to expect, having already sunk \$5 million into *The Forward* in support of Lipsky's tenure. So does Hertog. "The experience of starting a daily paper in New York will probably bring new meaning to the word 'humility,'" he says.

Lipsky, a careful student of newspaper history, understands that the path he is about to tread is littered with newspaper carcasses. The attraction of a daily place at the table in the densest media environment in the world isn't hard to understand, but the price is dear. The last attempt at a new Manhattan-based daily, *New York Newsday*, lost \$100 million over a decade before closing in 1995. The *Trib*, funded by a conservative cabal, was launched in 1978 and burned through \$4 million in just three months before imploding.

Lipsky thinks that by contracting out for printing and distribution and keeping circulation small and expenses down, he can gain a toehold. He finds inspiration in the penny press of the mid-1800s. "New York was a sink of pro-slavery sentiment, and it was crawling with Copperhead Democrats," he told me, tucking into a waffle at a nearby restaurant after our short tour of the offices. Horace Greeley was putting out the staunchly abolitionist *Tribune*, but "he wasn't willing to go to war." One of his editors, Charles Dana, was, and they eventually split over the issue. Dana served as an assistant secretary of war under Abraham Lincoln, covering the war for an audience of one. In 1868 he became the editor and part owner of the *New York Sun*, a penny-press paper started in 1833 by Benjamin H. Day, a printer looking to increase business. (Greeley called the *Sun* "the slimy and venomous instrument of Locofocoism,

NEW YORK
**DAVID
CARR**

Jesuitical and deadly in politics and grovelling in morals.”)

“Dana set the paper on a trajectory of limited government, equality under the law, free markets, pro-growth, strong foreign policy, integrity in government,” Lipsky says. It’s a constellation of issues that makes Lipsky entirely comfortable, which is why the name of the *Sun*—the old paper was folded into the *New York World-Telegram* in 1950—will rest atop the new enterprise. (The old *Sun* gave the editors of the world “Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.” It also published, in 1835, one of the greatest paper-selling hoaxes in journalism history: a new and powerful telescope revealed that the moon was populated by winged men who spent time “collecting various fruits in the woods, in eating, flying, bathing, and loitering about upon the summits of precipices.”)

Like Dana, Lipsky is willing to go to war. After graduating from Harvard in 1968, he covered civil-rights battles for the *Anniston Star*, in Alabama, for a year. He was then drafted and went to Vietnam to cover the conflict for *Stars and Stripes*. He has been a steadfast soldier in behalf of Israel, even if from behind a desk. The sanctity of the State of Israel is the single issue that unites the Democratic Steinhardt, the Republican Hertog, and Black—a media baron more conservative than Rupert Murdoch, if that is possible.

Some men of a certain age and status buy a fleet of cars, keep a stable of horses, or become golf bums. Steinhardt and Hertog, both of whom have huge personal fortunes, are enamored of policy and publishing, especially as they relate to Israel. In obtaining two thirds of *The New Republic* they will be joining Martin Peretz, whose commitment to Israel is writ large in the magazine week after week. Apart from being able to argue forcefully in both major media cities that a Jewish state is a vital American interest regardless of the price, the two men will bask in the peculiarly validating glow of print.

Steinhardt is not linking arms with Lipsky in the belief that it will add to the millions he already has. “This is a long shot financially,” he says. “And even if

you win, you don’t win big. This is something I just want to do.” His interest in *The New Republic* arises from a similar personal imperative. “I don’t expect to get rich in either endeavor, but I have a history of involvement in political matters with an emphasis on Jewish and Israeli issues,” he says. “For many Jews, Israel represents an ideal, and the fact that it doesn’t remotely resemble that ideal does not matter so much. There’s an emotional depth one feels about this issue that allows us in some important ways to be irrational about it.”



Lord Black of Crossharbour, the former Conrad Black, actually made his money in publishing. Through the *National Post*, in Canada, which he began in 1998 and sold last year, he attempted to affect the political culture of an entire nation. It didn’t work. Despite his \$200 million attempt to re-educate them, Canadians were still the “whining, politically conformist welfare addicts” he described them as in a 1993 memoir. Black unsuccessfully sued the Canadian Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien, after Chrétien spiked his first effort to ascend to the House of Lords. Black renounced his Canadian citizenship, and later became a Lord; he now lives in London. He is committed to a number of issues, including Israel’s security. That stance was made memorable in December, when Lady Black, who writes a column in her husband’s *Daily Telegraph* under her maiden name, Barbara Amiel, reported, “Re-

cently, the ambassador of a major EU country politely told a gathering at my home that the current troubles in the world were all because of ‘that shitty little country Israel.’” Fleet Street had fun with the ensuing dustup, naming the offender—Daniel Bernard, the French ambassador to Britain—and debating the wording of his remark.

Lipsky courted Black for a year, saying that Black’s publishing experience—especially his ownership of the *Telegraph* and the *Jerusalem Post*, both of which could provide international stories—

made him a critical component of the deal. Black has coveted a role in New York media for years; he made an effort to buy the *Daily News* in 1993 and came close to buying the *New York Observer* as recently as 1999. He has a pattern of entering a market in a small way in order to gain leverage for a larger play. In Canada, after a failed attempt to buy the *Financial Post*, he bought the well-respected magazine *Saturday Night* and then launched the *National Post*. He eventually acquired the *Financial Post* and folded it into the *National Post*. And in Britain he bought the weekly *Spectator* in addition to the *Daily Telegraph*. Many have wondered if his interest in the *Sun* will serve as a stalking-horse for other, more epic plans, even though his company, Hollinger International, issued a press release in December emphasizing that it has only a minority stake in the *Sun*, and that its role will be a minor one.

Given the heft of the names involved and Lipsky's reputation for seriousness and scoops, the *Sun* will most likely be part of the civic dialogue in New York for as long as it is published, even if it never explodes into a huge business. Steinhart says that the nearly simultaneous launch of the *Sun* and purchase of the majority share of *The New Republic* is coincidental, and that there will be no editorial or business synergy between the two publications. But the fact that Hertog, a steadfast conservative, will have a stake in *The New Republic* has its staff worried.

Lipsky replies with a hard stare of disbelief to any suggestion that he will be involved with *The New Republic*. His plate will certainly be full. He's planning to cover New York City in fairly comprehensive fashion, with a staff of no more than twenty-five reporters. Asked about the wisdom of signing up for the relentless cadence of five days a week, he replies, "I have said to those who have proposed starting a weekly that perhaps we should purchase Macy's and keep it open only on Fridays. I think that journalistically, it generates more horsepower as a daily."

While at *The Forward*, Lipsky did a lot with a little by spotting talent in its early stages. *Forward* alumni include Jeffrey Goldberg and Philip Courevitch, both now at *The New Yorker*; Jonathan Mahler, who went on to *Talk*; and Jonathan Rosen, the author of *The Talmud and the Internet*. Lipsky is old school all the way, telling his reporters that if they get the basics right, the rest will follow. In the tradition of Charles Dana, who gave lectures on the journalistic craft (they were eventually assembled into a book, *The Art of Newspaper Making*), Lipsky held forth in weekly meetings on how to practice it.

"In spite of his political leanings," Jeffrey Goldberg says, "I would describe those weekly craftsmanship meetings, as he called them, as very Maoist. He was one of the most incredibly annoying and maddening bosses I ever had, and I would send any talented twenty-five-year-old I know to work for him. He is one of the great scoop artists of all time. He would just push the fundamentals, telling us to get the

document, any document, and then we could write the story."

Lipsky's ability to inspire reporters with his walk-around, "whaddyagot?" style of newsroom management will come in handy. "In an age of buttoned-down newspaper executives, Lipsky is a homburg-wearing, oil-painting, thunderclap-editorial-writing creator," says Ira Stoll, who was Lipsky's managing editor at *The Forward* and is a key player in the new paper. (He also runs smartertimes.com, a daily Web spanking of *The New York Times*.) "The universe of newspaper executives is made up of guys who went through quickie business-executive training at Harvard or people who were lucky enough to inherit papers from their grandfathers. This is a dream he has been working for twenty years."

Russ Smith, the CEO and editor in chief of the weekly *New York Press* and an

admirer of Lipsky's politics, thinks that the *Sun* will find a spot between the *New York Post*, which, although conservative, "writes in big block letters," and the *Times*. "The best possible scenario for them is if they eventually reach a hundred thousand circulation, running maybe forty broadsheet pages ... sort of like *The Washington Times* versus *The Washington Post*," he says. *The Washington Times* owns its own jingoistic corner of the debate in that city, but at hellacious expense to its owner, the Unification Church.

Lipsky, unlike the dot-com visionaries who moved out of his new neighborhood sooner than they planned, entertains the possibility that his view of the future may not come to pass. "Obviously, Ira and I, along with our backers, would like to see this succeed," he says. "But failure at something like this would not be the most disgraceful thing in the world either."

ISLAM VERSUS THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

Russian muftis have condemned the war in Afghanistan, but Tatar Muslims have other things on their minds. Like Mork & Mindy

....

On November 14 of last year the chairman of the Council of Russian Muftis, Mufti Sheikh Ravil Gainutdin, announced that the victims of the war in Afghanistan were not the perpetrators of the September 11 terrorist attacks. The real victims, he said, were the "completely innocent civilian population of Afghan villages and cities." He went on to warn that the "struggle with international terrorism" was "taking on an ever more bellicose, anti-Islamic character" and was "intensifying confrontational moods between followers of Islam and other religious traditions." Gainutdin's statement, issued on behalf of the Muslim community of Russia, followed the even harsher comments made in a press conference eleven days earlier by his vice-chairman, Mufti Sheikh Nafigulla Ashirov, who had described the war as "criminal" and had denounced the Russian government for supporting a "U.S. crusade against Islam." Ashirov concluded his remarks by citing the "direct threat"

that the American presence in Central Asia posed to Russian national interests. "Once we let the Americans into this region," he declared, "they'll never leave." Reports were circulating in the press that Muslims in Tatarstan, an oil-producing Russian republic some 500 miles east of Moscow, had approached a Tatar nationalist organization hoping to volunteer to fight alongside the Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan.

War-minded Tatars, it turned out, numbered only about seventy—out of a population of 3.8 million, approximately half of whom are Muslim. But the muftis' strong words appeared to bode ill for the Kremlin, and not just because President Vladimir Putin has supported the United States in its fight against terrorism. If Tatarstan's Muslims were to rise up against Russian rule, as have the Chechens, they could create chaos in the heart of Russia and potentially disrupt oil exports, on which the country's economy heavily depends. A revival of

TATARSTAN
**JEFFREY
TAYLER**

Islam, which languished along with Orthodox Christianity during the Soviet era, is indeed under way, and the statistics are impressive: since the collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1991, the number of mosques in Tatarstan has grown from eighteen to more than a thousand, and an Islamic university has been founded to train the young for, among other things, service in mosques, *makhallya* (religious communities), and *madrassas* (religious schools). The revival serves the interests of Tatar nationalists, and insofar as it strengthens Tatar nationalism and remains moderate in nature, it has garnered the support of the republic's government, led by President Mintimer Sharipovich Shaimiyev.

All this being so, one might reasonably expect to find in Tatarstan the "confrontational moods" of which Gainutdin warned. To assess the situation, I recently traveled to Kazan, the republic's capital—a decrepit city on the Volga overshadowed by a white-walled kremlin on whose grounds stand both the Russian Orthodox Petropavlovsky Cathedral and the towering, Ottoman-style Kul Sharif Mosque. The mosque is not out of place here: Islam in Tatarstan antedates Christianity, having come to the region from Baghdad in A.D. 922.

What I discovered in Kazan was a happily mixed population of Tatars and Russians, Muslims and Christians, enjoying not just the amenities of secular life that are prevalent elsewhere in Russia but even many of the trappings of Western and, in particular, American culture. Bauman Street—the city's main pedestrian thoroughfare, which sits beneath the kremlin walls and the minarets of Kul Sharif—boasts the upscale perfume shop Image, a Reebok store, and a McDonald's. Bookshops and newsstands abound, carrying biographies of Marilyn Monroe, Salvador Dali, and Albert Einstein along with all the publications of the Russian tabloid press, which amount to little more than a collage of bare breasts and buttocks mixed with stories about sex and Hollywood scandals. A translation of Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* was selling well, as were the novels of Tom Clancy and Sidney Sheldon. I could find

little in the way of Islamic literature, or religious literature of any kind. Tatarstan's two local television stations broadcast almost no religious programming but lots of *Mork & Mindy*, *Magnum P.I.*, *Batman*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Scooby-Doo*, and professional wrestling,

have visited the Raki Beer Bar, next to the kremlin, and spent an evening drinking Krasnyi Vostok (the locally brewed beer) or potent traditional liqueurs. The city's premier cinema, the Druzhba, was featuring three American movies (*Don't Say a Word*, *Artificial In-*



interspersed with an endless array of B-grade American thrillers. In five days of touring Kazan, I saw perhaps two or three women wearing the *yaulyk* (as the traditional Islamic head scarf is called in Tatar). Much more common were Russian-style fur hats, form-fitting coats, and high-heeled boots.

Venturing out in the evening, I found that I had a broad choice of entertainment venues, none of which would have been to the Taliban's liking. These included the Manhattan Club, where customers downed beer, vodka, and mixed drinks as they bowled to Western pop tunes, often after buying cigarettes from the Camel vending machine by the door; the Fashion Club, where male and female striptease artists performed to an eager and grasping audience (striptease acts are common in Kazan's nightclubs, as they are in the rest of Russia); and the more or less sedate Jolly Roger's bar. Thoroughly un-Islamic was the Gentlemen Club, where young women offered patrons three varieties of private lap dance: "*prostoy*" (simple), "*dostupnyi*" (touching allowed), or "*goryachii*" (hot). If I had wanted just to get drunk, I could

telligence, and *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*) and a French one (*Vidocq*). Before and after the shows patrons of the Druzhba could (and did) enjoy beer, vodka, and American soft drinks sold at a mirrored bar on the second floor. Kazan's circus offered children a chance to see Ded Moroz (Grandfather Frost, the Russian equivalent of Santa Claus).

If these spectacles aroused Muslim ire, I saw and heard no indication of it. What one sees of Islam in Kazan is a moderate and intimidated manifestation. Shortly after arriving, I visited Gabdrashit Zakirov, a vice-rector of the Russian Islamic University, in his office. The university has been operating since 1998, but although tuition is free, it has only 148 students—a small number indeed, given that Kazan itself has half a million Muslim inhabitants. Dressed in navy-blue Tatar robes and a black *tyubetey* (skullcap), Zakirov seemed like the sort of observant Muslim the muftis might claim to speak for. But he professed ignorance of the incendiary remarks made by Gainutdin and Ashirov. The war against the Taliban

and al Qaeda, he told me, was a “matter for politicians,” not religious men, and in any case it was taking place “thousands of kilometers away,” so he knew “little about it.” When I pressed him for the religious point of view on what he did know, he said that all he could offer would be an “emotional answer of no real value”—and then declined to give me even that. He did tell me that since Russia’s law protecting freedom of speech and worship recognizes “the special role of the Orthodox Church [which has expressed support for the U.S. military action following September 11] in Russian history,” he feared that Russian Muslims were now coming to be seen as “internal enemies”—a remark suggesting that his reticence was rooted in a fear of the state. The most assertive declaration he made to me was that Moscow’s policy on the war should take into account the interests of Russian Muslims.

I then telephoned Abdulkhak Khazret, the imam of one of Kazan’s most prominent functioning mosques, al-Mardzhani. Khazret told me that he would not meet me to discuss the war, because “many people have talked about the subject, so I wouldn’t add much new ... This is a political question, and I’m not a politician.” When I stressed that I wanted the Islamic perspective and so was turning to him, he developed difficulty in speaking Russian. “Oh ... I have trouble, you see, putting word to word, my Russian no good. Sorry ...”

At the Tatar-American Regional Institute, where I visited an Arabic class, the students were more talkative. Emma, the only young woman in the class wearing a *yauilyk*, told me that she feels uncomfortable going about in public with the scarf on: it makes her the object of stares and derogatory remarks. Her bareheaded Arabic teacher, Zulfia, concurred, saying that her parents objected if she wore the *yauilyk*. “Why are you wearing that scarf?” they would say to her. “You’re young and beautiful but you’re dressing like a grandma!”

I brought up the war in Chechnya, an emotional issue in much of the Islamic world—but not, it turned out, in Kazan. The conflict, Zulfia told me, was about money, not religion; it was a

“political affair,” and “we don’t know the real story behind it”; it was therefore “doubtful” that the Chechens’ struggle constituted a “*jihad*.” Just what did Islam mean for the students? It meant being urged by parents to keep the *uraza* (the fast of Ramadan) or to attend *jumga* (Friday prayer ceremony); but few said that they complied, and all defended their right to decide on their own if they wanted to practice their faith. One young woman in another class found my interest in Islam misplaced. “Excuse me, but for seventy years [the Soviets] destroyed religion here, so Islam plays no part in our life. You should ask us about something else.”

She had a point. During the Soviet era atheistic education and the closing of mosques and churches ensured a waning of religious beliefs and practices. And certainly repression has played a historical role in the modest position that Islam occupies in Tatar life. Ivan the Terrible conquered Kazan in 1522, after

which he killed or expelled the city’s Muslim population. Later czars pursued subtler anti-Islamic policies, with the result that many Tatars converted to Christianity, and the Russian and Tatar aristocracies began to intermarry. The majority of Muslims in Kazan today fall easily into secular habits, because Islam is a minority faith in a culturally Orthodox Christian country, and Tatarstan’s location in the middle of Russia permits no easy access to the Muslim lands on Russia’s southern periphery.

All that being said, what truly sustains secularism in Tatarstan today, and what gives the harsh words of prominent muftis little purchase among the masses, is something else—the relatively free market, which provides Tatars with a ready supply of Western pleasures and products, not to mention ideas, of which the Soviet system had deprived them. It is exactly this sort of market-driven secularism that many Muslim clerics fear—and with good reason.

A MODEST PROPOSAL FROM THE BRIGADIER

What one prominent Pakistani thinks his country should do with its atomic weapons

.....

In the center of the biggest traffic circle of every major city in Pakistan sits a craggy, Gibraltarish replica of a nameless peak in the Chagai range. This mountain is the home of Pakistan’s nuclear test site. The development, in 1998, of the “Islamic Bomb,” intended as a counter to India’s nuclear capability, is Pakistan’s only celebrated achievement since its formation, in 1947. The mountain replicas, about three stories tall, are surrounded by flower beds that are lovingly weeded, watered, and manicured. At dusk, when the streetlights come on, so do the mountains, glowing a weird molten yellow.

Islamabad’s monument to the atomic bomb occupies a rotary between the airport and the city center. Nearby stand models of Pakistan’s two classes of missile: Shaheen and Chauri. The Islamabad nuclear shrine stands at a place where the city is dissolving into an incoherent edge town of shabby

strip malls and empty boulevards and rows of desolate government buildings. A little farther in one comes to the grid-ded blocks of gated homes. The neighborhoods are called sectors. The streets are numbered, not named.

ISLAMABAD
**PETER
LANDESMAN**

Late last year, after nearly two months in Pakistan, I paid the last of many visits to house No. 8 on street 19, sector F-8/2, a modern white mansion known as Zardari House. The house has been used by Asif Ali Zardari, the imprisoned husband of Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan’s exiled former Prime Minister. Neither Zardari nor Bhutto has been there for a long time. Zardari has been confined for five years, most recently in Attock Fort, a medieval fortress perched over the Indus River between Islamabad and Peshawar. He is charged with a slew of crimes: large-scale corruption; conspiracy in the murder of Bhutto’s brother Mir Murtaza; conspiracy to smuggle narcotics. Bhutto, who also

faces corruption charges in Pakistan, lives in Dubai with their three children. Pakistan's leader, General Pervez Musharraf, has promised to have her arrested and tried if she ever returns to Pakistan. Outside the gate to the empty Zardari House sits a man with his back to the wall, a sawed-off shotgun across his knees.

I had been going there to consult with Brigadier Amanullah, known to his friends as Aman. Aman, in his early fifties and now retired, is lithe and gentle-natured and seemed to me slightly depressed. He works in a small office behind Zardari House, where, as the secretary to Benazir Bhutto in Islamabad, he coordinates Bhutto's efforts to return to Pakistan and regain its prime ministership. He also keeps in close touch with old colleagues, who include many powerful people in Pakistan. Aman was once the chief of Pakistan's military intelligence in Sind Province, which borders India. Pakistan's biggest city and a cultural center, Karachi, is in Sind. That put Aman squarely in the middle of things, his finger near many sorts of buttons. Today Aman is believed to act as Bhutto's liaison with the armed forces, and he maintains contacts with serving army officers, including senior generals. When I wanted to speak to someone in the Pakistani government, I asked Aman. When I wanted to speak to someone in the Taliban, or in military intelligence, or in the political opposition, I asked Aman. His replies were mumbled and monosyllabic. He never offered opinions. He would simply hear me out and, most times, tip his head and say, "Why not?" Within an hour after Aman and I parted, I would receive a phone call from his secretary. References would be made to "that man" or "that matter," and I would be given a phone number and a time to call. Having spoken with Aman, I was always expected.

On the day of my final visit Aman seemed more sullen than usual. He ushered me into a room adjoining the office. The room was long and spare. There was an oil painting on the far wall. The other walls were empty and lined with cushioned chairs. Aman sat across from me. We had tea and spoke about the latest events.

As we were wrapping up our conversation, I looked at the oil painting. It was a strange picture, a horizontal landscape about four feet across, with overtones of socialist realism. In the foreground a youthful Benazir Bhutto stood in heroic pose on an escarpment overlooking the featureless grid of Islamabad. Beside her stood her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a Prime Minister who in 1977 was ousted in a coup and two years later hanged. On the other side of Bhutto was Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the long-dead founding father of Pakistan. Their postures were exalted, their expressions a combination of pride and awe. Jinnah's arm pointed to the vast plain beyond the city, where a rocket was lifting out of billowing clouds of vapor and fire into the sky.

Aman noticed me looking at the painting and followed my gaze. I asked him if Benazir Bhutto had commissioned it, and Aman said no. He told me that one day when she was still Prime Minister, an unknown man, an ordinary Pakistani citizen, had come to the gate of Zardari House with the picture and told Aman that he'd painted it for the Prime Minister and wanted to present it to her as a gift. Aman said that he was immediately transfixed by the painting. He called to Bhutto inside the house, but she refused to come down to see the man. Aman was persistent, and eventually she came down.

"I insisted Benazir accept it as a gift," Aman told me.

We both looked up at the painting in silence. "A rocket ship heading to the moon?" I asked.

Aman tipped his head to the side. A smirk tugged at the corners of his mouth. "No," he said. "A nuclear war-head heading to India."

I thought he was making a joke. Then I saw he wasn't. I thought of the shrines to Pakistan's nuclear-weapons site, prominently displayed in every city. I told Aman that I was disturbed by the ease with which Pakistanis talk of nuclear war with India.

Aman shook his head. "No," he said matter-of-factly. "This should happen. We should use the bomb."

"For what purpose?" He didn't seem to understand my question. "In retaliation?" I asked.

"Why not?"

"Or first strike?"

"Why not?"

I looked for a sign of irony. None was visible. Rocking his head side to side, his expression becoming more and more withdrawn, Aman launched into a monologue that neither of us, I am sure, knew was coming:

"We should fire at them and take out a few of their cities—Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta," he said. "They should fire back and take Karachi and Lahore. Kill off a hundred or two hundred million people. They should fire at us and it would all be over. They have acted so badly toward us; they have been so mean. We should teach them a lesson. It would teach all of us a lesson. There is no future here, and we need to start over. So many people think this. Have you been to the villages of Pakistan, the interior? There is nothing but dire poverty and pain. The children have no education; there is nothing to look forward to. Go into the villages, see the poverty. There is no drinking water. Small children without shoes walk miles for a drink of water. I go to the villages and I want to cry. My children have no future. None of the children of Pakistan have a future. We are surrounded by nothing but war and suffering. Millions should die away."

"Pakistan should fire pre-emptively?" I asked.

Aman nodded.

"And you are willing to see your children die?"

"Tens of thousands of people are dying in Kashmir, and the only super-power says nothing," Aman said. "America has sided with India because it has interests there." He told me he was willing to see his children be killed. He repeated that they didn't have any future—his children or any other children.

I asked him if he thought he was alone in his thoughts, and Aman made it clear to me that he was not.

"Believe me," he went on, "If I were in charge, I would have already done it."

Aman stopped, as though he'd stunned even himself. Then he added, with quiet forcefulness, "Before I die, I hope I should see it." ▀

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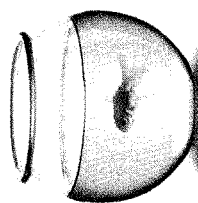
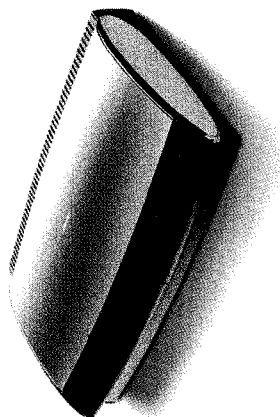
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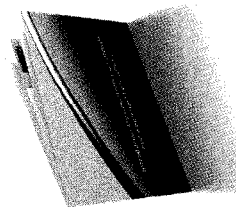
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1491

Before it became the New World, the Western Hemisphere was vastly more populous and sophisticated than has been thought—an altogether more salubrious place to live at the time than, say, Europe. New evidence of both the extent of the population and its agricultural advancement leads to a remarkable conjecture: the Amazon rain forest may be largely a human artifact

BY CHARLES C. MANN

Illustrations by C. F. Payne

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The plane took off in weather that was surprisingly cool for north-central Bolivia and flew east, toward the Brazilian border. In a few minutes the roads and houses disappeared, and the only evidence of human settlement was the cattle scattered over the savannah like jimmies on ice cream. Then they, too, disappeared. By that time the archaeologists had their cameras out and were clicking away in delight.

Below us was the Beni, a Bolivian province about the size of Illinois and Indiana put together, and nearly as flat. For almost half the year rain and snowmelt from the mountains to the south and west cover the land with an irregular, slowly moving skin of water that eventually ends up in the province's northern rivers, which are sub-subtributaries of the Amazon. The rest of the year the water dries up and the bright-green vastness turns into something that resembles a desert. This peculiar, remote, watery plain was what had drawn the researchers' attention, and not just because it was one of the few places on earth inhabited by people who might never have seen Westerners with cameras.

Clark Erickson and William Balée, the archaeologists, sat up front. Erickson is based at the University of Pennsylvania; he works in concert with a Bolivian archaeologist, whose seat in the plane I usurped that day. Balée is at Tulane University, in New Orleans. He is actually an anthropologist, but as native peoples have vanished, the distinction between anthropologists and archaeologists has blurred. The two men differ in build, temperament, and scholarly proclivity, but they pressed their faces to the windows with identical enthusiasm.



Dappled across the grasslands below was an archipelago of forest islands, many of them startlingly round and hundreds of acres across. Each island rose ten or thirty or sixty feet above the floodplain, allowing trees to grow that would otherwise never survive the water. The forests were linked by raised berms, as straight as a rifle shot and up to three miles long. It is Erickson's belief that this entire landscape—30,000 square miles of forest mounds surrounded by raised fields and linked by causeways—

was constructed by a complex, populous society more than 2,000 years ago. Balée, newer to the Beni, leaned toward this view but was not yet ready to commit himself.

Erickson and Balée belong to a cohort of scholars that has radically challenged conventional notions of what the Western Hemisphere was like before Columbus. When I went to high school, in the 1970s, I was taught that Indians came to the Americas across the Bering Strait about 12,000 years ago, that they lived for the most part in small, isolated groups, and that they had so little impact on their environment that even after millennia of habitation it remained mostly wilderness. My son picked up the same ideas at his schools. One way to summarize the views of people like Erickson and Balée would be to say that in their opinion this picture of Indian life is wrong in almost every aspect. Indians were here far longer than previously thought, these researchers believe, and in much greater numbers. And they were so successful at imposing their will on the landscape that in 1492 Columbus set foot in a hemisphere thoroughly dominated by humankind.

Given the charged relations between white societies and native peoples, inquiry into Indian culture and history is inevitably contentious. But the recent scholarship is especially controversial. To begin with, some researchers—many but not all from an older generation—deride the new theories as fantasies arising from an almost willful misinterpretation of data and a perverse kind of political correctness. “I have seen no evidence that large numbers of people ever lived in the Beni,” says Betty J. Meggers, of the Smithsonian Institution. “Claiming otherwise is just wishful thinking.” Similar criticisms apply to many of the new scholarly claims about Indians, according to Dean R. Snow, an anthropologist at Pennsylvania State University. The problem is that “you can make the meager evidence from the ethnohistorical record tell you anything you want,” he says. “It’s really easy to kid yourself.”

More important are the implications of the new theories for today’s ecological battles. Much of the environmental movement is animated, consciously or not, by what William Denevan, a geographer at the University of Wisconsin, calls, polemically, “the pristine myth”—the belief that the Americas in 1491 were an almost unmarked, even Edenic land, “untrammelled by man,” in the words of the Wilderness Act of 1964, one of the nation’s first and most important environmental laws. As the University of Wisconsin historian William Cronon has written, restoring this long-ago, putatively natural state is, in the view of environmentalists, a task that society is morally bound to undertake. Yet if the new view is correct and the work of humankind was pervasive, where does that leave efforts to restore nature?

The Beni is a case in point. In addition to building up the Beni mounds for houses and gardens, Erickson says, the Indians trapped fish in the seasonally flooded grassland. Indeed, he says, they fashioned dense zigzagging networks of earthen fish weirs between the causeways. To keep the habitat clear of unwanted trees and undergrowth, they regularly set huge areas on fire. Over the centuries the burning created an intricate ecosystem of fire-adapted plant species dependent on native pyrophilia. The current inhabitants of the Beni still burn, although now it is to maintain the savannah for cattle. When we flew over the area, the dry season had just begun, but mile-long lines of flame were already on the march. In the charred areas behind the fires were the blackened spikes of trees—many of them, one assumes, of the varieties that activists fight to save in other parts of Amazonia.

After we landed, I asked Balée, Should we let people keep burning the Beni? Or should we let the trees invade

and create a verdant tropical forest in the grasslands, even if one had not existed here for millennia?

Balée laughed. “You’re trying to trap me, aren’t you?” he said.

LIKE A CLUB BETWEEN THE EYES

According to family lore, my great-grandmother’s great-grandmother’s great-grandfather was the first white person hanged in America. His name was John Billington. He came on the *Mayflower*, which anchored off the coast of Massachusetts on November 9, 1620. Billington was not a Puritan; within six months of arrival he also became the first white person in America to be tried for complaining about the police. “He is a knave,” William Bradford, the colony’s governor, wrote of Billington, “and so will live and die.” What one historian called Billington’s “troublesome career” ended in 1630, when he was hanged for murder. My family has always said that he was framed—but we *would* say that, wouldn’t we?

A few years ago it occurred to me that my ancestor and everyone else in the colony had voluntarily enlisted in a venture that brought them to New England without food or shelter six weeks before winter. Half the 102 people on the *Mayflower* made it through to spring, which to me was amazing. How, I wondered, did they survive?

In his history of Plymouth Colony, Bradford provided the answer: by robbing Indian houses and graves. The *Mayflower* first hove to at Cape Cod. An armed company staggered out. Eventually it found a recently deserted Indian settlement. The newcomers—hungry, cold, sick—dug up graves and ransacked houses, looking for underground stashes of corn. “And sure it was God’s good providence that we found this corn,” Bradford wrote, “for else we know not how we should have done.” (He felt uneasy about the thievery, though.) When the colonists came to Plymouth, a month later, they set up shop in another deserted Indian village. All through the coastal forest the Indians had “died on heapes, as they lay in their houses,” the English trader Thomas Morton noted. “And the bones and skulls upon the severall places of their habitations made such a spectacle” that to Morton the Massachusetts woods seemed to be “a new found Golgotha”—the hill of executions in Roman Jerusalem.

To the Pilgrims’ astonishment, one of the corpses they exhumed on Cape Cod had blond hair. A French ship had been wrecked there several years earlier. The Patuxet Indians imprisoned a few survivors. One of them supposedly learned enough of the local language to inform his captors

Indians were here in greater numbers than previously thought, and they imposed their will on the landscape. Columbus set foot in a hemisphere thoroughly dominated by humankind.

that God would destroy them for their misdeeds. The Patuxet scoffed at the threat. But the Europeans carried a disease, and they bequeathed it to their jailers. The epidemic (probably of viral hepatitis, according to a study by Arthur E. Spiess, an archaeologist at the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, and Bruce D. Spiess, the director of clinical research at the Medical College of Virginia) took years to exhaust itself and may have killed 90 percent of the people in coastal New England. It made a huge difference to American history. “The good hand of God favored our beginnings,” Bradford mused, by “sweeping away great multitudes of the natives . . . that he might make room for us.”

By the time my ancestor set sail on the *Mayflower*, Europeans had been visiting New England for more than a hundred years. English, French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese mariners regularly plied the coastline, trading what they could, occasionally kidnapping the inhabitants for slaves. New England, the Europeans saw, was thickly settled and well defended. In 1605 and 1606 Samuel de Champlain visited Cape Cod, hoping to establish a French base. He abandoned the idea. Too many people already lived there. A year later Sir Ferdinando Gorges—British despite his name—tried to establish an English community in southern Maine. It had more founders than Plymouth and seems to have been better organized. Confronted by numerous well-armed local Indians, the settlers abandoned the project within months. The Indians at Plymouth would surely have been an equal obstacle to my ancestor and his ramshackle expedition had disease not intervened.

Faced with such stories, historians have long wondered how many people lived in the Americas at the time of contact. “Debated since Columbus attempted a partial census on Hispaniola in 1496,” William Denevan has written, this “remains one of the great inquiries of history.” (In 1976 Denevan assembled and edited an entire book on the subject, *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492*.) The first scholarly estimate of the indigenous population was made in 1910 by James Mooney, a distinguished ethnographer at the Smithsonian Institution. Combing through old documents, he concluded that in 1491 North America had 1.15 million inhabitants. Mooney’s glittering reputation ensured that most subsequent researchers accepted his figure uncritically.

That changed in 1966, when Henry F. Dobyns published “Estimating Aboriginal American Population: An Appraisal of Techniques With a New Hemispheric Estimate,” in the journal *Current Anthropology*. Despite the carefully neutral title, his argument was thunderous, its impact long-lasting. In the view of James Wilson, the author of *The Earth Shall Weep* (1998), a history of indigenous Americans, Dobyns’s colleagues “are still struggling to get out of the crater that paper left in anthropology.” Not only anthropologists were affected. Dobyns’s estimate proved to be one of the opening rounds in today’s culture wars.

Dobyns began his exploration of pre-Columbian Indian demography in the early 1950s, when he was a graduate student. At the invitation of a friend, he spent a few months in northern Mexico, which is full of Spanish-era missions. There he poked through the crumbling leather-bound ledgers in which Jesuits recorded local births and deaths. Right away he noticed how many more deaths there were. The Spaniards arrived, and then Indians died—in huge numbers, at incredible rates. It hit him, Dobyns told me recently, “like a club right between the eyes.”

It took Dobyns eleven years to obtain his Ph.D. Along the way he joined a rural-development project in Peru, which until colonial times was the seat of the Incan empire. Remembering what he had seen at the northern fringe of the Spanish conquest, Dobyns decided to compare it with figures for the south. He burrowed into the papers of the Lima cathedral and read apologetic Spanish histories. The Indians in Peru, Dobyns concluded, had faced plagues from the day the conquistadors showed up—in fact, before then: smallpox arrived around 1525, seven years ahead of the Spanish. Brought to Mexico apparently by a single sick Spaniard, it swept south and eliminated more than half the population of the Incan empire. Smallpox claimed the Incan dictator Huayna Capac and much of his family, setting off a calamitous war of succession. So complete was the chaos that Francisco Pizarro was able to seize an empire the size of Spain and Italy combined with a force of 168 men.

Smallpox was only the first epidemic. Typhus (probably) in 1546, influenza and smallpox together in 1558, smallpox again in 1589, diphtheria in 1614, measles in 1618—all ravaged the remains of Incan culture. Dobyns was the first social scientist to piece together this awful picture, and he naturally rushed his findings into print. Hardly anyone paid attention. But Dobyns was already working on a second, related question: If all those people died, how many had been living there to begin with? Before Columbus, Dobyns calculated, the Western Hemisphere held ninety to 112 million people. Another way of saying this is that in 1491 more people lived in the Americas than in Europe.

His argument was simple but horrific. It is well known that Native Americans had no experience with many European diseases and were therefore immunologically unprepared—“virgin soil,” in the metaphor of epidemiologists. What Dobyns realized was that such diseases could have swept from the coastlines initially visited by Europeans to inland areas controlled by Indians who had never seen a white person. The first whites to explore many parts of the Americas may therefore have encountered places that were already depopulated. Indeed, Dobyns argued, they must have done so.

Peru was one example, the Pacific Northwest another. In 1792 the British navigator George Vancouver led the first European expedition to survey Puget Sound. He

found a vast charnel house: human remains “promiscuously scattered about the beach, in great numbers.” Smallpox, Vancouver’s crew discovered, had preceded them. Its few survivors, second lieutenant Peter Puget noted, were “most terribly pitted ... indeed many have lost their Eyes.” In *Pox Americana* (2001), Elizabeth Fenn, a historian at George Washington University, contends that the disaster on the northwest coast was but a small part of a continental pandemic that erupted near Boston in 1774 and cut down Indians from Mexico to Alaska.

Because smallpox was not endemic in the Americas, colonials, too, had not acquired any immunity. The virus, an equal-opportunity killer, swept through the Continental Army and stopped the drive into Quebec. The American Revolution would be lost, Washington and other rebel leaders feared, if the contagion did to the colonists what it had done to the Indians. “The small Pox! The small Pox!” John Adams wrote to his wife, Abigail. “What shall We do with it?” In retrospect, Fenn says, “One of George Washington’s most brilliant moves was to inoculate the army against smallpox during the Valley Forge winter of ’78.” Without inoculation smallpox could easily have given the United States back to the British.

So many epidemics occurred in the Americas, Dobyns argued, that the old data used by Mooney and his successors represented population nadirs. From the few cases in which before-and-after totals are known with rela-

tive certainty, Dobyns estimated that in the first 130 years of contact about 95 percent of the people in the Americas died—the worst demographic calamity in recorded history.

Dobyns’s ideas were quickly attacked as politically motivated, a push from the hate-America crowd to inflate the toll of imperialism. The attacks continue to this day. “No question about it, some people want those higher numbers,” says Shepard Krech III, a Brown University anthropologist who is the author of *The Ecological Indian* (1999). These people, he says, were thrilled when Dobyns revisited the subject in a book, *Their Numbers Become Thinned* (1983)—and revised his own estimates upward. Perhaps Dobyns’s most vehement critic is David Henige, a bibliographer of Africana at the University of Wisconsin, whose *Numbers From Nowhere* (1998) is a landmark in the literature of demographic fulmination. “Suspect in 1966, it is no less suspect nowadays,” Henige wrote of Dobyns’s work. “If anything, it is worse.”

When Henige wrote *Numbers From Nowhere*, the fight about pre-Columbian populations had already consumed forests’ worth of trees; his bibliography is ninety pages long. And the dispute shows no sign of abating. More and

more people have jumped in. This is partly because the subject is inherently fascinating. But more likely the increased interest in the debate is due to the growing realization of the high political and ecological stakes.

INVENTING BY THE MILLIONS

On May 30, 1539, Hernando de Soto landed his private army near Tampa Bay, in Florida. Soto, as he was called, was a novel figure: half warrior, half venture capitalist. He had grown very rich very young by becoming a market leader in the nascent trade for Indian slaves. The profits had helped to fund Pizarro’s seizure of the Incan empire, which had made Soto wealthier still. Looking quite literally for new worlds to conquer, he persuaded the Spanish Crown to let him loose in North America. He spent one fortune to make another. He came to Florida with 200 horses, 600 soldiers, and 300 pigs.

From today’s perspective, it is difficult to imagine the ethical system that would justify Soto’s actions. For four years his force, looking for gold, wandered through what is now Florida, Georgia, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Texas, wrecking almost everything it touched. The inhabitants often fought back vigorously, but they had never before encountered an army with horses and guns. Soto died of fever with his expedition in ruins; along the way his men had managed to rape, torture, enslave, and kill

countless Indians. But the worst thing the Spaniards did, some researchers say, was entirely without malice—bring the pigs.

According to Charles Hudson, an anthropologist at the University of Georgia who spent fifteen years reconstructing the path of the expedition, Soto crossed the Mississippi a few miles downstream from the present site of Memphis. It was a nervous passage: the Spaniards were watched by several thousand Indian warriors. Utterly without fear, Soto brushed past the Indian force into what is now eastern Arkansas, through thickly settled land—“very well peopled with large towns,” one of his men later recalled, “two or three of which were to be seen from one town.” Eventually the Spaniards approached a cluster of small cities, each protected by earthen walls, sizeable moats, and deadeye archers. In his usual fashion, Soto brazenly marched in, stole food, and marched out.

After Soto left, no Europeans visited this part of the Mississippi Valley for more than a century. Early in 1682 whites appeared again, this time Frenchmen in canoes. One of them was René-Robert Cavalier, Sieur de la Salle. The French passed through the area where Soto had found

In the Aztec capital Tenochtitlán the Spaniards gawped like hayseeds at the wide streets, ornately carved buildings, and markets bright with goods from hundreds of miles away.

cities cheek by jowl. It was deserted—La Salle didn't see an Indian village for 200 miles. About fifty settlements existed in this strip of the Mississippi when Soto showed up, according to Anne Ramenofsky, an anthropologist at the University of New Mexico. By La Salle's time the number had shrunk to perhaps ten, some probably inhabited by recent immigrants. Soto "had a privileged glimpse" of an Indian world, Hudson says. "The window opened and slammed shut. When the French came in and the record opened up again, it was a transformed reality. A civilization crumbled. The question is, how did this happen?"

The question is even more complex than it may seem. Disaster of this magnitude suggests epidemic disease. In the view of Ramenofsky and Patricia Galloway, an anthropologist at the University of Texas, the source of the contagion was very likely not Soto's army but its ambulatory meat locker: his 300 pigs. Soto's force itself was too small to be an effective biological weapon. Sickneses like measles and smallpox would have burned through his 600 soldiers long before they reached the Mississippi. But the same would not have held true for the pigs, which multiplied rapidly and were able to transmit their diseases to wildlife in the surrounding forest. When human beings and domesticated animals live close together, they trade microbes with abandon. Over time mutation spawns new diseases: avian influenza becomes human influenza, bovine rinderpest becomes measles. Unlike Europeans, Indians did not live in close quarters with animals—they domesticated only the dog, the llama, the alpaca, the guinea pig, and, here and there, the turkey and the Muscovy duck. In some ways this is not surprising: the New World had fewer animal candidates for taming than the Old. Moreover, few Indians carry the gene that permits adults to digest lactose, a form of sugar abundant in milk. Non-milk-drinkers, one imagines, would be less likely to work at domesticating milk-giving animals. But this is guesswork. The fact is that what scientists call zoonotic disease was little known in the Americas. Swine alone can disseminate anthrax, brucellosis, leptospirosis, taeniasis, trichinosis, and tuberculosis. Pigs breed exuberantly and can transmit diseases to deer and turkeys. Only a few of Soto's pigs would have had to wander off to infect the forest.

Indeed, the calamity wrought by Soto apparently extended across the whole Southeast. The Coosa city-states, in

western Georgia, and the Caddoan-speaking civilization, centered on the Texas-Arkansas border, disintegrated soon after Soto appeared. The Caddo had had a taste for monumental architecture: public plazas, ceremonial platforms, mausoleums. After Soto's army left, notes Timothy K. Perttula, an archaeological consultant in Austin, Texas, the Caddo stopped building community centers and began digging community cemeteries. Between Soto's and La Salle's visits, Perttula believes, the Caddoan population fell from about 200,000 to about 8,500—a drop of nearly 96 percent. In the eighteenth century the tally shrank further, to 1,400. An equivalent loss today in the population of New York City would reduce it to 56,000—not enough to fill Yankee Stadium. "That's one reason whites think of Indians as

nomadic hunters," says Russell Thornton, an anthropologist at the University of California at Los Angeles. "Everything else—all the heavily populated urbanized societies—was wiped out."

Could a few pigs truly wreak this much destruction? Such apocalyptic scenarios invite skepticism. As a rule, viruses, microbes, and parasites are rarely lethal on so wide a scale—a pest that wipes out its host species does not have a bright evolutionary future. In its worst outbreak, from 1347 to 1351, the European Black Death claimed only a third of its victims. (The rest survived, though they were often disfigured or crippled by its effects.) The Indians in Soto's path, if Dobyns, Ramenofsky, and Perttula are correct, endured

losses that were incomprehensibly greater.

One reason is that Indians were fresh territory for many plagues, not just one. Smallpox, typhoid, bubonic plague, influenza, mumps, measles, whooping cough—all rained down on the Americas in the century after Columbus. (Cholera, malaria, and scarlet fever came later.) Having little experience with epidemic diseases, Indians had no knowledge of how to combat them. In contrast, Europeans were well versed in the brutal logic of quarantine. They boarded up houses in which plague appeared and fled to the countryside. In Indian New England, Neal Salisbury, a historian at Smith College, wrote in *Manitou and Providence* (1982), family and friends gathered with the shaman at the sufferer's bedside to wait out the illness—a practice that "could only have served to spread the disease more rapidly."

Indigenous biochemistry may also have played a role. The immune system constantly scans the body for mole-



cules that it can recognize as foreign—molecules belonging to an invading virus, for instance. No one's immune system can identify all foreign presences. Roughly speaking, an individual's set of defensive tools is known as his MHC type. Because many bacteria and viruses mutate easily, they usually attack in the form of several slightly different strains. Pathogens win when MHC types miss some of the strains and the immune system is not stimulated to act. Most human groups contain many MHC types; a strain that slips by one person's defenses will be nailed by the defenses of the next. But, according to Francis L. Black, an epidemiologist at Yale University, Indians are characterized by unusually homogenous MHC types. One out of three South American Indians have similar MHC types; among Africans the corresponding figure is one in 200. The cause is a matter for Darwinian speculation, the effects less so.

In 1966 Dobyns's insistence on the role of disease was a shock to his colleagues. Today the impact of European pathogens on the New World is almost undisputed. Nonetheless, the fight over Indian numbers continues with undiminished fervor. Estimates of the population of North America in 1491 disagree by an order of magnitude—from 18 million, Dobyns's revised figure, to 1.8 million, calculated by Douglas H. Ubelaker, an anthropologist at the Smithsonian. To some "high counters," as David Henige calls them, the low counters' refusal to relinquish the vision of an empty continent is ir-

rational or worse. "Non-Indian 'experts' always want to minimize the size of aboriginal populations," says Lenore Stiffarm, a Native American-education specialist at the University of Saskatchewan. The smaller the numbers of Indians, she believes, the easier it is to regard the continent as having been up for grabs. "It's perfectly acceptable to move into unoccupied land," Stiffarm says. "And land with only a few 'savages' is the next best thing."

"Most of the arguments for the very large numbers have been theoretical," Ubelaker says in defense of low counters. "When you try to marry the theoretical arguments to the data that are available on individual groups in different regions, it's hard to find support for those numbers." Archaeologists, he says, keep searching for the settlements in which those millions of people supposedly lived, with little success. "As more and more excavation is done, one would expect to see more evidence for dense populations than has thus far emerged." Dean Snow, the Pennsylvania State anthropologist, examined Colonial-era Mohawk Iroquois sites and found "no support for the notion that ubiquitous pandemics swept the region." In his view, asserting that the continent was filled with people who left no trace is like

looking at an empty bank account and claiming that it must once have held millions of dollars.

The low counters are also troubled by the Dobynsian procedure for recovering original population numbers: applying an assumed death rate, usually 95 percent, to the observed population nadir. Ubelaker believes that the lowest point for Indians in North America was around 1900, when their numbers fell to about half a million. Assuming a 95 percent death rate, the pre-contact population would have been 10 million. Go up one percent, to a 96 percent death rate, and the figure jumps to 12.5 million—arithmetically creating more than two million people from a tiny increase in mortality rates. At 98 percent the number bounds to 25 million. Minute changes in baseline assumptions produce wildly different results.

"It's an absolutely unanswerable question on which tens of thousands of words have been spent to no purpose," Henige says. In 1976 he sat in on a seminar by William Denevan, the Wisconsin geographer. An "epiphanic moment" occurred when he read shortly afterward that scholars had "uncovered" the existence of eight million people in Hispaniola. *Can you just invent millions of people?* he

wondered. "We can make of the historical record that there was depopulation and movement of people from internecine warfare and diseases," he says. "But as for how much, who knows? When we start putting numbers to something like that—applying large

figures like ninety-five percent—we're saying things we shouldn't say. The number implies a level of knowledge that's impossible."

Nonetheless, one must try—or so Denevan believes. In his estimation the high counters (though not the highest counters) seem to be winning the argument, at least for now. No definitive data exist, he says, but the majority of the extant evidentiary scraps support their side. Even Henige is no low counter. When I asked him what he thought the population of the Americas was before Columbus, he insisted that any answer would be speculation and made me promise not to print what he was going to say next. Then he named a figure that forty years ago would have caused a commotion.

To Elizabeth Fenn, the smallpox historian, the squabble over numbers obscures a central fact. Whether one million or 10 million or 100 million died, she believes, the pall of sorrow that engulfed the hemisphere was immeasurable. Languages, prayers, hopes, habits, and dreams—entire ways of life hissed away like steam. The Spanish and the Portuguese lacked the germ theory of disease and could not explain what was happening (let alone stop it). Nor

Swine alone can disseminate anthrax, brucellosis, leptospirosis, trichinosis, and tuberculosis. Only a few of Hernando de Soto's pigs would have had to wander off to infect the forest.

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can we explain it; the ruin was too long ago and too all-encompassing. In the long run, Fenn says, the consequential finding is not that many people died but that many people once lived. The Americas were filled with a stunningly diverse assortment of peoples who had knocked about the continents for millennia. "You have to wonder," Fenn says. "What were all those people *up* to in all that time?"

BUFFALO FARM

In 1810 Henry Brackenridge came to Cahokia, in what is now southwest Illinois, just across the Mississippi from St. Louis. Born close to the frontier, Brackenridge was a budding adventure writer; his *Views of Louisiana*, published three years later, was a kind of nineteenth-century *Into Thin Air*, with terrific adventure but without tragedy. Brackenridge had an eye for archaeology, and he had heard that Cahokia was worth a visit. When he got there, trudging along the desolate Cahokia River, he was "struck with a degree of astonishment." Rising from the muddy bottomland was a "stupendous pile of earth," vaster than the Great Pyramid at Giza. Around it were more than a hundred smaller mounds, covering an area of five square miles. At the time, the area was almost uninhabited.

One can only imagine what passed through Brackenridge's mind as he walked alone to the ruins of the biggest Indian city north of the Rio Grande.

To Brackenridge, it seemed clear that Cahokia and the many other ruins

in the Midwest had been constructed by Indians. It was not so clear to everyone else. Nineteenth-century writers attributed them to, among others, the Vikings, the Chinese, the "Hindoos," the ancient Greeks, the ancient Egyptians, lost tribes of Israelites, and even straying bands of Welsh. (This last claim was surprisingly widespread; when Lewis and Clark surveyed the Missouri, Jefferson told them to keep an eye out for errant bands of Welsh-speaking white Indians.) The historian George Bancroft, dean of his profession, was a dissenter: the earthworks, he wrote in 1840, were purely natural formations.

Bancroft changed his mind about Cahokia, but not about Indians. To the end of his days he regarded them as "feeble barbarians, destitute of commerce and of political connection." His characterization lasted, largely unchanged, for more than a century. Samuel Eliot Morison, the winner of two Pulitzer Prizes, closed his monumental *European Discovery of America* (1974) with the observation that Native Americans expected only "short and brutish lives, void of hope for any future." As late as 1987 *American History: A Survey*, a standard high school textbook by three well-known historians, described the Americas before Columbus as "empty of

mankind and its works." The story of Europeans in the New World, the book explained, "is the story of the creation of a civilization where none existed."

Alfred Crosby, a historian at the University of Texas, came to other conclusions. Crosby's *The Columbian Exchange: Biological Consequences of 1492* caused almost as much of a stir when it was published, in 1972, as Henry Dobyns's calculation of Indian numbers six years earlier, though in different circles. Crosby was a standard names-and-battles historian who became frustrated by the random contingency of political events. "Some trivial thing happens and you have this guy winning the presidency instead of that guy," he says. He decided to go deeper. After he finished his manuscript, it sat on his shelf—he couldn't find a publisher willing to be associated with his new ideas. It took him three years to persuade a small editorial house to put it out. *The Columbian Exchange* has been in print ever since; a companion, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900*, appeared in 1986.

Human history, in Crosby's interpretation, is marked by two world-altering centers of invention: the Middle East and central Mexico, where Indian groups independently

created nearly all of the Neolithic innovations, writing included. The Neolithic Revolution began in the Middle East about 10,000 years ago. In the next few millennia humankind invented the wheel, the metal tool, and agriculture. The Sumerians eventually put

I asked seven anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians if they would rather have been a typical Indian or a typical European in 1491. Every one chose to be an Indian.

these inventions together, added writing, and became the world's first civilization. Afterward Sumeria's heirs in Europe and Asia frantically copied one another's happiest discoveries; innovations ricocheted from one corner of Eurasia to another, stimulating technological progress. Native Americans, who had crossed to Alaska before Sumeria, missed out on the bounty. "They had to do everything on their own," Crosby says. Remarkably, they succeeded.

When Columbus appeared in the Caribbean, the descendants of the world's two Neolithic civilizations collided, with overwhelming consequences for both. American Neolithic development occurred later than that of the Middle East, possibly because the Indians needed more time to build up the requisite population density. Without beasts of burden they could not capitalize on the wheel (for individual workers on uneven terrain skids are nearly as effective as carts for hauling), and they never developed steel. But in agriculture they handily outstripped the children of Sumeria. Every tomato in Italy, every potato in Ireland, and every hot pepper in Thailand came from this hemisphere. Worldwide, more than half the crops grown today were initially developed in the Americas.

Maize, as corn is called in the rest of the world, was a triumph with global implications. Indians developed an extraordinary number of maize varieties for different growing conditions, which meant that the crop could and did spread throughout the planet. Central and Southern Europeans became particularly dependent on it; maize was the staple of Serbia, Romania, and Moldavia by the nineteenth century. Indian crops dramatically reduced hunger, Crosby says, which led to an Old World population boom.

Along with peanuts and manioc, maize came to Africa and transformed agriculture there, too. "The probability is that the population of Africa was greatly increased because of maize and other American Indian crops," Crosby says. "Those extra people helped make the slave trade possible." Maize conquered Africa at the time when introduced diseases were leveling Indian societies. The Spanish, the Portuguese, and the British were alarmed by the death rate among Indians, because they wanted to exploit them as workers. Faced with a labor shortage, the Europeans turned their eyes to Africa. The continent's quarrelsome societies helped slave traders to siphon off millions of people. The maize-fed population boom, Crosby believes, let the awful trade continue without pumping the well dry.

Back home in the Americas, Indian agriculture long sustained some of the world's largest cities. The Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán dazzled Hernán Cortés in 1519; it was bigger than Paris, Europe's greatest metropolis. The Spaniards gawped like hayseeds at the wide streets, ornately carved buildings, and markets bright with goods from hundreds of miles away. They had never before seen a city with botanical gardens, for the excellent reason that none existed in Europe. The same novelty attended the force of a thousand men that kept the crowded streets immaculate. (Streets that weren't ankle-deep in sewage! The conquistadors had never heard of such a thing.) Central America was not the only locus of prosperity. Thousands of miles north, John Smith, of Pocahontas fame, visited Massachusetts in 1614, before it was emptied by disease, and declared that the land was "so planted with Gardens and Corne fields, and so well inhabited with a goodly, strong and well proportioned people ... [that] I would rather live here than any where."

Smith was promoting colonization, and so had reason to exaggerate. But he also knew the hunger, sickness, and

oppression of European life. France—"by any standards a privileged country," according to its great historian, Fernand Braudel—experienced seven nationwide famines in the fifteenth century and thirteen in the sixteenth. Disease was hunger's constant companion. During epidemics in London the dead were heaped onto carts "like common dung" (the simile is Daniel Defoe's) and trundled through the streets. The infant death rate in London orphanages, according to one contemporary source, was 88 percent. Governments were harsh, the rule of law arbitrary. The gibbets poking up in the background of so many old paintings were, Braudel observed, "merely a realistic detail."

The Earth Shall Weep, James Wilson's history of Indian America, puts the comparison bluntly: "the western hemisphere was larger, richer, and more populous than Europe." Much of it was freer, too. Europeans, accustomed to the serfdom that thrived from Naples to the Baltic Sea, were puzzled and alarmed by the democratic spirit and respect for human rights in many Indian societies, especially those in North America. In theory, the sachems of New England Indian groups were absolute monarchs. In practice, the colonial leader Roger Williams wrote, "they will not conclude of ought ... unto which the people are averse."

Pre-1492 America wasn't a disease-free paradise, Dobyns says, although in his "exuberance as a writer," he told me recently, he once made that claim. Indians had ailments of their own, notably parasites, tuberculosis, and anemia. The daily grind was wearing; life-spans in America were

only as long as or a little longer than those in Europe, if the evidence of indigenous graveyards is to be believed. Nor was it a political utopia—the Inca, for instance, invented refinements to totalitarian rule that would have intrigued Stalin. Inveterate practitioners of what the historian Francis Jennings described as "state terrorism practiced horrifically on a huge scale," the Inca ruled so cruelly that one can speculate that their surviving subjects might actually have been better off under Spanish rule.

I asked seven anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians if they would rather have been a typical Indian or a typical European in 1491. None was delighted by the question, because it required judging the past by the standards of today—a fallacy disparaged as "presentism" by social scientists. But every one chose to be an Indian. Some early



colonists gave the same answer. Horrifying the leaders of Jamestown and Plymouth, scores of English ran off to live with the Indians. My ancestor shared their desire, which is what led to the trumped-up murder charges against him—or that's what my grandfather told me, anyway.

As for the Indians, evidence suggests that they often viewed Europeans with disdain. The Hurons, a chagrined missionary reported, thought the French possessed "little intelligence in comparison to themselves." Europeans, Indians said, were physically weak, sexually untrustworthy, atrociously ugly, and just plain dirty. (Spaniards, who seldom if ever bathed, were amazed by the Aztec desire for personal cleanliness.) A Jesuit reported that the "Savages" were disgusted by handkerchiefs: "They say, we place what is unclean in a fine white piece of linen, and put it away in our pockets as something very precious, while they throw it upon the ground." The Micmac scoffed at the notion of French superiority. If Christian civilization was so wonderful, why were its inhabitants leaving?

Like people everywhere, Indians survived by cleverly exploiting their environment. Europeans tended to manage land by breaking it into fragments for farmers and herders. Indians often worked on such a grand scale that the scope of their ambition can be hard to grasp. They created small plots, as Europeans did (about 1.5 million acres of terraces still exist in the Peruvian Andes), but they also reshaped entire landscapes to suit their purposes.

A principal tool was fire, used to keep down underbrush and create the open, grassy conditions favorable for game. Rather than domesticating animals for meat, Indians retooled whole ecosystems to grow bumper crops of elk, deer, and bison. The first white settlers in Ohio found forests as open as English parks—they could drive carriages through the woods. Along the Hudson River the annual fall burning lit up the banks for miles on end; so flashy was the show that the Dutch in New Amsterdam boated upriver to goggle at the blaze like children at fireworks. In North America, Indian torches had their biggest impact on the Midwestern prairie, much or most of which was created and maintained by fire. Millennia of exuberant burning shaped the plains into vast buffalo farms. When Indian societies disintegrated, forest invaded savannah in Wisconsin, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, and the Texas Hill Country. Is it possible that the Indians changed the Americas more than the invading Europeans did? "The answer is probably yes for most regions for the next 250 years or so" after Columbus, William Denevan wrote, "and for some regions right up to the present time."

When scholars first began increasing their estimates of the ecological impact of Indian civilization, they met with

considerable resistance from anthropologists and archaeologists. Over time the consensus in the human sciences changed. Under Denevan's direction, Oxford University Press has just issued the third volume of a huge catalogue of the "cultivated landscapes" of the Americas. This sort of phrase still provokes vehement objection—but the main dissenters are now ecologists and environmentalists. The disagreement is encapsulated by Amazonia, which has become *the* emblem of vanishing wilderness—an admonitory image of untouched Nature. Yet recently a growing number of researchers have come to believe that Indian societies had an enormous environmental impact on the jungle. Indeed, some anthropologists have called the Amazon forest itself a cultural artifact—that is, an artificial object.

GREEN PRISONS

Northern visitors' first reaction to the storied Amazon rain forest is often disappointment. Ecotourist brochures evoke the immensity of Amazonia but rarely dwell on its extreme flatness. In the river's first 2,900 miles the vertical drop is only 500 feet. The river oozes like a huge runnel of dirty metal through a landscape utterly

devoid of the romantic crags, arroyos, and heights that signify wildness and natural spectacle to most North Americans. Even the animals are invisible, although sometimes one can hear the bellow of monkey choruses. To the untutored eye—mine, for instance—

the forest seems to stretch out in a monstrous green tangle as flat and incomprehensible as a printed circuit board.

The area east of the lower-Amazon town of Santarém is an exception. A series of sandstone ridges several hundred feet high reach down from the north, halting almost at the water's edge. Their tops stand drunkenly above the jungle like old tombstones. Many of the caves in the buttes are splattered with ancient petroglyphs—renditions of hands, stars, frogs, and human figures, all reminiscent of Miró, in overlapping red and yellow and brown. In recent years one of these caves, La Caverna da Pedra Pintada (Painted Rock Cave), has drawn attention in archaeological circles.

Wide and shallow and well lit, Painted Rock Cave is less thronged with bats than some of the other caves. The arched entrance is twenty feet high and lined with rock paintings. Out front is a sunny natural patio suitable for picnicking, edged by a few big rocks. People lived in this cave more than 11,000 years ago. They had no agriculture yet, and instead ate fish and fruit and built fires. During a recent visit I ate a sandwich atop a particularly inviting rock and looked over the forest below. The first Amazonians, I thought, must have done more or less the same thing.

Amazonia has become *the* emblem of vanishing wilderness—an admonitory image of untouched Nature. But the rain forest itself may be a cultural artifact—that is, an artificial object.

In college I took an introductory anthropology class in which I read *Amazonia: Man and Culture in a Counterfeit Paradise* (1971), perhaps the most influential book ever written about the Amazon, and one that deeply impressed me at the time. Written by Betty J. Meggers, the Smithsonian archaeologist, *Amazonia* says that the apparent lushness of the rain forest is a sham. The soils are poor and can't hold nutrients—the jungle flora exists only because it snatches up everything worthwhile before it leaches away in the rain. Agriculture, which depends on extracting the wealth of the soil, therefore faces inherent ecological limitations in the wet desert of Amazonia.

As a result, Meggers argued, Indian villages were forced to remain small—any report of “more than a few hundred” people in permanent settlements, she told me recently, “makes my alarm bells go off.” Bigger, more complex societies would inevitably overtax the forest soils, laying waste to their own foundations. Beginning in 1948 Meggers and her late husband, Clifford Evans, excavated a chiefdom on Marajó, an island twice the size of New Jersey that sits like a gigantic stopper in the mouth of the Amazon. The Marajóara, they concluded, were failed offshoots of a sophisticated culture in the Andes. Transplanted to the lush trap of the Amazon, the culture choked and died.

Green activists saw the implication: development in tropical forests destroys both the forests and their developers. Meggers's account had enormous public impact—*Amazonia* is one of the wellsprings of the campaign to save rain forests.

Then Anna C. Roosevelt, the curator of archaeology at Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History, re-excavated Marajó. Her complete report, *Moundbuilders of the Amazon* (1991), was like the anti-matter version of *Amazonia*. Marajó, she argued, was “one of the outstanding indigenous cultural achievements of the New World,” a powerhouse that lasted for more than a thousand years, had “possibly well over 100,000” inhabitants, and covered thousands of square miles. Rather than damaging the forest, Marajó's “earth construction” and “large, dense populations” had improved it: the most luxuriant and diverse growth was on the mounds formerly occupied by the Marajóara. “If you listened to Meggers's theory, these places should have been ruined,” Roosevelt says.

Meggers scoffed at Roosevelt's “extravagant claims,”

“polemical tone,” and “defamatory remarks.” Roosevelt, Meggers argued, had committed the beginner's error of mistaking a site that had been occupied many times by small, unstable groups for a single, long-lasting society. “[Archaeological remains] build up on areas of half a kilometer or so,” she told me, “because [shifting Indian groups] don't land exactly on the same spot. The decorated types of pottery don't change much over time, so you can pick up a bunch of chips and say, ‘Oh, look, it was all one big site!’ Unless you know what you're doing, of course.” Centuries after the conquistadors, “the myth of El Dorado is being revived by archaeologists,” Meggers wrote last fall in the journal *Latin American Antiquity*, referring to the persistent Spanish delusion that cities of gold existed in the jungle.



The dispute grew bitter and personal; inevitable in a contemporary academic context, it has featured vituperative references to colonialism, elitism, and employment by the CIA. Meanwhile, Roosevelt's team investigated Painted Rock Cave. On the floor of the cave what looked to me like nothing in particular turned out to be an ancient midden: a refuse heap. The archaeologists slowly scraped away sediment, traveling backward in time with every inch. When the traces of human occupation vanished, they kept digging. (“You always go a meter past sterile,” Roosevelt says.) A few inches below they struck the charcoal-rich dirt that signifies human habitation—a culture, Roosevelt said

later, that wasn't supposed to be there.

For many millennia the cave's inhabitants hunted and gathered for food. But by about 4,000 years ago they were growing crops—perhaps as many as 140 of them, according to Charles R. Clement, an anthropological botanist at the Brazilian National Institute for Amazonian Research. Unlike Europeans, who planted mainly annual crops, the Indians, he says, centered their agriculture on the Amazon's unbelievably diverse assortment of trees: fruits, nuts, and palms. “It's tremendously difficult to clear fields with stone tools,” Clement says. “If you can plant trees, you get twenty years of productivity out of your work instead of two or three.”

Planting their orchards, the first Amazonians transformed large swaths of the river basin into something more pleasing to human beings. In a widely cited article from 1989, William Balée, the Tulane anthropologist, cautiously estimated that about 12 percent of the nonflooded Amazon

forest was of anthropogenic origin—directly or indirectly created by human beings. In some circles this is now seen as a conservative position. “I basically think it’s all human-created,” Clement told me in Brazil. He argues that Indians changed the assortment and density of species throughout the region. So does Clark Erickson, the University of Pennsylvania archaeologist, who told me in Bolivia that the lowland tropical forests of South America are among the finest works of art on the planet. “Some of my colleagues would say that’s pretty radical,” he said, smiling mischievously. According to Peter Stahl, an anthropologist at the State University of New York at Binghamton, “lots” of botanists believe that “what the eco-imagery would like to picture as a pristine, untouched Urwelt [primeval world] in fact has been managed by people for millennia.” The phrase “built environment,” Erickson says, “applies to most, if not all, Neotropical landscapes.”

“Landscape” in this case is meant exactly—Amazonian Indians literally created the ground beneath their feet. According to William I. Woods, a soil geographer at Southern Illinois University, ecologists’ claims about terrible Amazonian land were based on very little data. In the late 1990s Woods and others began careful measurements in the lower Amazon. They indeed found lots of inhospitable terrain. But they also discovered swaths of *terra preta*—rich, fertile “black earth” that anthropologists increasingly believe was created by human beings.

Terra preta, Woods guesses, covers at least 10 percent of Amazonia, an area the size of France. It has amazing properties, he says. Tropical rain doesn’t leach nutrients from *terra preta* fields; instead the soil, so to speak, fights back. Not far from Painted Rock Cave is a 300-acre area with a two-foot layer of *terra preta* quarried by locals for potting soil. The bottom third of the layer is never removed, workers there explain, because over time it will re-create the original soil layer in its initial thickness. The reason, scientists suspect, is that *terra preta* is generated by a special suite of microorganisms that resists depletion. “Apparently,” Woods and the Wisconsin geographer Joseph M. McCann argued in a presentation last summer, “at some threshold level ... dark earth attains the capacity to perpetuate—even regenerate itself—thus behaving more like a living ‘super’-organism than an inert material.”

In as yet unpublished research the archaeologists Eduardo Neves, of the University of São Paulo; Michael Heckenberger, of the University of Florida; and their colleagues examined *terra preta* in the upper Xingu, a huge southern tributary of the Amazon. Not all Xingu cultures left behind this living earth, they discovered. But the ones

that did generated it rapidly—suggesting to Woods that *terra preta* was created deliberately. In a process reminiscent of dropping microorganism-rich starter into plain dough to create sourdough bread, Amazonian peoples, he believes, inoculated bad soil with a transforming bacterial charge. Not every group of Indians there did this, but quite a few did, and over an extended period of time.

When Woods told me this, I was so amazed that I almost dropped the phone. I ceased to be articulate for a moment and said things like “wow” and “gosh.” Woods chuckled at my reaction, probably because he understood what was passing through my mind. Faced with an ecological problem, I was thinking, the Indians *fixed* it. They were in the process of terraforming the Amazon when Columbus showed up and ruined everything.

Scientists should study the microorganisms in *terra preta*, Woods told me, to find out how they work. If that could be learned, maybe some version of Amazonian dark earth could be used to improve the vast expanses of bad soil that cripple agriculture in Africa—a final gift from the people who brought us tomatoes, corn, and the immense grasslands of the Great Plains.

Environmentalists want to preserve as much of the world’s land as possible in a putatively intact state. But “intact” may turn out to mean “run by human beings for human purposes.”

“Betty Meggers would just die if she heard me saying this,” Woods told me. “Deep down her fear is that this data will be mis-used.” Indeed, Meggers’s recent *Latin American Antiquity* article charged that archaeologists who say the Amazon can support agri-

culture are effectively telling “developers [that they] are entitled to operate without restraint.” Resuscitating the myth of El Dorado, in her view, “makes us accomplices in the accelerating pace of environmental degradation.” Doubtless there is something to this—although, as some of her critics responded in the same issue of the journal, it is difficult to imagine greedy plutocrats “perusing the pages of *Latin American Antiquity* before deciding to rev up the chain saws.” But the new picture doesn’t automatically legitimize paving the forest. Instead it suggests that for a long time big chunks of Amazonia were used nondestructively by clever people who knew tricks we have yet to learn.

I visited Painted Rock Cave during the river’s annual flood, when it wells up over its banks and creeps inland for miles. Farmers in the floodplain build houses and barns on stilts and watch pink dolphins sport from their doorsteps. Ecotourists take shortcuts by driving motorboats through the drowned forest. Guys in dories chase after them, trying to sell sacks of incredibly good fruit.

All of this is described as “wilderness” in the tourist brochures. It’s not, if researchers like Roosevelt are correct. Indeed, they believe that fewer people may be living there

now than in 1491. Yet when my boat glided into the trees, the forest shut out the sky like the closing of an umbrella. Within a few hundred yards the human presence seemed to vanish. I felt alone and small, but in a way that was curiously like feeling exalted. If that place was not wilderness, how should I think of it? Since the fate of the forest is in our hands, what should be our goal for its future?

NOVEL SHORES

Hernando de Soto's expedition stomped through the Southeast for four years and apparently never saw bison. More than a century later, when French explorers came down the Mississippi, they saw "a solitude unrelieved by the faintest trace of man," the nineteenth-century historian Francis Parkman wrote. Instead the French encountered bison, "grazing in herds on the great prairies which then bordered the river."

To Charles Kay, the reason for the buffalo's sudden emergence is obvious. Kay is a wildlife ecologist in the political-science department at Utah State University. In ecological terms, he says, the Indians were the "keystone species" of American ecosystems. A keystone species, according to the Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson, is a species "that affects the survival and abundance of many other species." Keystone species have a disproportionate impact on their ecosystems. Removing them, Wilson adds, "results in a relatively significant shift in the composition of the [ecological] community."

When disease swept Indians from the land, Kay says, what happened was exactly that. The ecological ancien régime collapsed, and strange new phenomena emerged. In a way this is unsurprising; for better or worse, humankind is a keystone species everywhere. Among these phenomena was a population explosion in the species that the Indians had kept down by hunting. After disease killed off the Indians, Kay believes, buffalo vastly extended their range. Their numbers more than sextupled. The same occurred with elk and mule deer. "If the elk were here in great numbers all this time, the archaeological sites should be chock-full of elk bones," Kay says. "But the archaeologists will tell you the elk weren't there." On the evidence of middens the number of elk jumped about 500 years ago.

Passenger pigeons may be another example. The epitome of natural American abundance, they flew in such great masses that the first colonists were stupefied by the sight. As a boy, the explorer Henry Brackenridge saw flocks "ten miles in width, by one hundred and twenty in length." For hours the birds darkened the sky from horizon to horizon. According to Thomas Neumann, a consulting archaeologist in Lilburn, Georgia, passenger pigeons "were incredibly dumb and always roosted in vast hordes, so they were very easy to harvest." Because they were readily caught and good to eat, Neumann says, archaeological digs should find many pigeon bones in the pre-Columbian strata of Indian

middens. But they aren't there. The mobs of birds in the history books, he says, were "outbreak populations—always a symptom of an extraordinarily disrupted ecological system."

Throughout eastern North America the open landscape seen by the first Europeans quickly filled in with forest. According to William Cronon, of the University of Wisconsin, later colonists began complaining about how hard it was to get around. (Eventually, of course, they stripped New England almost bare of trees.) When Europeans moved west, they were preceded by two waves: one of disease, the other of ecological disturbance. The former crested with fearsome rapidity; the latter sometimes took more than a century to quiet down. Far from destroying pristine wilderness, European settlers bloodily *created* it. By 1800 the hemisphere was chockablock with new wilderness. If "forest primeval" means a woodland unsullied by the human presence, William Denevan has written, there was much more of it in the late eighteenth century than in the early sixteenth.

Cronon's *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (1983) belongs on the same shelf as works by Crosby and Dobyns. But it was not until one of his articles was excerpted in *The New York Times* in 1995 that people outside the social sciences began to understand the implications of this view of Indian history. Environmentalists and ecologists vigorously attacked the anti-wilderness scenario, which they described as infected by postmodern philosophy. A small academic brouhaha ensued, complete with hundreds of footnotes. It precipitated *Re-inventing Nature?* (1995), one of the few academic critiques of postmodernist philosophy written largely by biologists. *The Great New Wilderness Debate* (1998), another lengthy book on the subject, was edited by two philosophers who earnestly identified themselves as "Euro-American men [whose] cultural legacy is patriarchal Western civilization in its current postcolonial, globally hegemonic form."

It is easy to tweak academics for opaque, self-protective language like this. Nonetheless, their concerns were quite justified. Crediting Indians with the role of keystone species has implications for the way the current Euro-American members of that keystone species manage the forests, watersheds, and endangered species of America. Because a third of the United States is owned by the federal government, the issue inevitably has political ramifications. In Amazonia, fabled storehouse of biodiversity, the stakes are global.

Guided by the pristine myth, mainstream environmentalists want to preserve as much of the world's land as possible in a putatively intact state. But "intact," if the new research is correct, means "run by human beings for human purposes." Environmentalists dislike this, because it seems to mean that anything goes. In a sense they are correct. Native Americans managed the continent as they saw fit. Modern nations must do the same. If they want to return as much of the landscape as possible to its 1491 state, they will have to find it within themselves to create the world's largest garden. ▀

THE WORLD IN 2005

Hidden in plain sight

BY ROBERT D. KAPLAN

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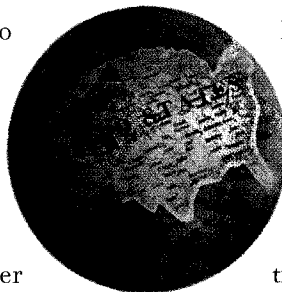
As Americans, we have a natural tendency to believe that world events over the next few years will unfold from September 11. But in truth much of the world will evolve without regard to September 11. Civil wars will continue, diseases will break out, and local economic crises will run their course. The challenge is to anticipate how these other processes will intersect with the war on terrorism.

We saw an example of such intersection after the start of the air campaign in Afghanistan, when anti-Americanism among Muslims in northern Nigeria sparked a pogrom that left hundreds of local Christians dead or wounded. Intercommunal riots have been on the increase in Nigeria for years—the result, in part, of rising numbers of young males and the destabilizing effects of democratization, which have strengthened the forces of religious mobilization. The collision of these factors with America's anti-terror campaign ignited the recent violence.

What other existing trends are likely to collide with the war on terrorism—and how?

In the Middle East the war on terrorism could have the unintended consequence of disturbing regional politics to a degree unknown since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I. Remember that the war has been launched at a time when secular-nationalist regimes in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq are so vulnerable that only the sons of dictators are trusted to succeed the dictators. Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia are all facing, at best, Mexican-style political and economic disorder, without Mexico's advantage of a long border with a First World country to which it can export millions of jobless workers and from which it can import billions of investment dollars. Because of economic and cultural transformation tied to urbanization, the next generation of Arab autocrats will, like their Mexican counterparts today, not be permitted to rule as autocratically as their predecessors. Yet none of these countries is capable of sustainable parliamentary democracy, not even to the limited degree that Mexico has achieved.

Aggravating the kind of political and economic turbu-



lence that has been a feature of Mexican society for more than a decade will be bulges in the number of youths across the Middle East, the most severe occurring in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Gaza, and the West Bank. In Egypt, too, the percentage of males between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine—the age group that traditionally stirs up unrest—will be dangerously high through 2020. Meanwhile, the amount of available water per capita will diminish by nearly half in many parts of the Middle East over the next twenty years. These inescapable realities will only become more troublesome if there is any sort of global economic downturn.

In Cairo, President Hosni Mubarak's banal authoritarianism represents the Egyptian equivalent of the Soviet Union's Brezhnev-Chernenko era. There is no Mikhail Gorbachev on the horizon. Saudi Arabia, despite its oil wealth, will prove even less governable than Egypt. It lacks the organizing geography of a great river valley, where most of the population lives within easy reach of central control. In stretches of Saudi Arabia, such as Nejd, the regime has already essentially lost its legitimacy. The experience of neighboring Yemen, with its brazen highwaymen and rampant kidnappings, may be what Saudi Arabia can look forward to—and that's the optimistic view.

Nominally pro-American regimes in the Arab heartland are not the only ones in a state of calcification. So is the anti-American regime in Iran. There the population of 66 million is refreshingly pro-American, owing to real-life experience with an Islamic revolution that has bankrupted the middle class and destroyed both the aura and the legitimacy of the clergy. In Iraq the level of repression is comparable to that in the Soviet Union under Stalin and in Romania under Nicolae Ceaușescu. Once Saddam Hussein's regime is brought down, the reaction among the populace may be no less enthusiastic than it was in Afghanistan when the United States dismantled the Taliban regime.

The Middle East, then, may be poised for a flip-flop, with the United States having embassies a few years hence in Tehran and Baghdad but not in Cairo, and with U.S. forces withdrawing from bases in an increasingly volatile Saudi Arabia.

KAMIL VOJNAR

A black and white photograph of Dean Hashimoto, a man with glasses, looking upwards. He is positioned in front of a large bookshelf filled with books. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and shadows.

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Although the American-led anti-terror campaign may stoke the flames of fundamentalism in some places, including Egypt, the new century will ultimately see the implosion of political Islam. Because there is “no Islamic way to fix a car,” as the saying goes, Islamic regimes offer only the sterile repression of the Taliban or the incompetent economic management of the ayatollahs. The rise of militant Islam in Pakistan, if it continues, will not create a new anti-American force so much as it will further weaken the state itself. Pakistani Islamists, divided by ethnicity and subdivided by clan, lack a unifying, Khomeini-like figure.

Indeed, the most dangerous underlying trend in the Subcontinent is the weakening of central authority. This, in turn, intensifies bellicosity between Pakistan and India, because foreign policy represents the last arena in which the state can exert its traditional primacy. The fate of the war on terrorism will hinge to no small degree on the ability of the Bush Administration to manage the India-Pakistan rivalry. Pakistani intervention in the affairs of Afghanistan lay behind the radicalization of Afghanistan’s politics in the first place. That intervention was driven by the need to create a rear wall of militant Islamic states to stand against predominantly Hindu India.

This brings us to Central Asia, which straddles the former Soviet Union and China. In the 1990s, even as the world witnessed ethnic warfare in the Caucasus and political chaos in Russia itself, the former Soviet republics of Central Asia were quiet, their populations kept under tight control by ex-communist bosses such as Islam Karimov, in Uzbekistan, and Saparmurad Niyazov, in Turkmenistan. Because Central Asia experienced little of Gorbachev’s glasnost or perestroika, it had too few reformed communists to provide the basis of a secular opposition. Therefore the only serious opposition to the region’s stultifying autocracies has been Islamic. As that Islamic opposition grows in Central Asia, so will Russia’s paranoia—and so will its incentive to cooperate with the United States against terrorism.

The same holds true for China, where further modernization, before leading to stable democracy, will heighten ethnic conflict between the Han Chinese and the Muslim Turkic Uighurs in the western part of the country (historically known as East Turkistan). Among the reasons the Chinese cooperated with our effort to topple the Taliban was that Uighur radicals were to be found in al Qaeda training camps.

The rising threat of militant Islam in the Asian steppes could usher in a new “concert of powers” that, while not ending competition among the United States, Russia, and China, will provide a framework for cooperation. Stability in Afghanistan can be achieved only by commanders and warlords, each fearful of the other, cutting deals that serve one another’s self-interest; a modicum of order in a disorderly world can be had only on the basis of a similarly wary cooperation.

In Africa the rising tide of young males will be even more extreme than in the Middle East. The top ten “youth-bulge”

countries are all in sub-Saharan Africa. Whereas the 1990s saw the implosion of small states (Somalia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone), the next decade, judging by recent political violence that has devolved into gang warlordism in a number of African cities, could see the implosion of larger entities such as Côte d’Ivoire and Kenya. Nigeria is already crumbling, although too slowly to generate headlines. The loss of central authority may be part of a long-term transition that will ultimately yield positive results. But in the short term it will provide new opportunities and havens for global terrorist groups, which thrive in weakly governed realms.

As al Qaeda’s 1998 bombing of the American missions in Kenya and Tanzania demonstrated, the safety of U.S. embassies in Africa has become increasingly difficult to guarantee. The years ahead could witness more embassy downsizings in Africa, together with commando raids on terrorist hideouts. Humanitarian crises in Africa will worsen in the near future, even as the United States pays less attention to the continent, because of other foreign-policy concerns and because America’s diminished affluence will temper national idealism. If NATO does not begin to work through the United Nations to organize a global constabulary force for select humanitarian interventions, the application of American power against terrorists will run the risk of seeming narrowly self-serving—undermining America’s reputation and thus its ability to be a benevolent global power.

Finally, in Latin America, as in so many other places, the teeming urban underclasses remain poor and politically disenfranchised. They are supporters-in-waiting for populist authoritarianism, as witnessed in Venezuela, under General Hugo Chavez. The United States is riding a tiger there: Venezuela is the third largest supplier of oil to the United States. Given global interconnection and the fragility of so many regimes, the possibilities for unintended consequences to foreign action are legion. The near future may see catastrophic chain reactions: a terrorist attack in one place may prompt a military attack someplace else, which sets off riots in yet another place, leading to a coup in a pivotal country elsewhere.

From the 1950s through the 1980s the existence of the Cold War justified media coverage of far-off countries in little-known parts of the world. The war on terror will do the same. It will provide a template for foreign news. But in the shadows will lurk a philosophical tension: A world that is closer and more dangerous than ever necessitates a heightened pragmatism in U.S. foreign policy. At the same time, global elites in this interconnected world will demand a heightened idealism from President Bush if he is to have legitimacy in their eyes. Presidential rhetoric may get nobler even as American policies become more ruthless. Closing the distance between the two—through a global constabulary force and similar measures—will constitute the principal challenge for American foreign policy. ■



SPECIAL COLLECTIONS *The Warhol Warehouse*

Back in the 1960s it seemed that Andy Warhol had everything—money and fame, a stellar career as an artist, a great residence and a greater studio, legions of friends and hordes of admirers. But, unbeknown to the public, Warhol had even more than all that: he had clutter, too. Profound clutter.

Warhol's appetite as a collector was legendary, but that was only part of the story; he was also, it seems, quite an accumulator. Much of his clutter he picked up casually—on the street or in a theater or a café or a shop he happened to pass—and much of it simply showed up unbidden, courtesy of the United States Postal Service. In that regard he was like everyone else—but on a much, much larger scale.

His solution to the problem was no less large. From time to time he would scamper around, scoop up his clutter, and pack it into a huge cardboard box, which he would then seal and label. Ever conscious and nurturing of his celebrity, Warhol called these boxes "time capsules" (each box was marked "TC"), and he eventually accumulated so many of them that they became the very clutter they were

supposed to eliminate. Today 612 of them are in the possession of the Andy Warhol Museum, in Pittsburgh; once in a while, when he can spare the time and the manpower, the museum's archivist, John Smith, will have his staff open one, catalogue its contents, and then repack and reseal it. So far the curators have gone through about a hundred time capsules, but still, Smith says, "we never know what we're going to find." A typical TC, No. 31, was most likely packed up around March of 1968; it contains books and magazines and newspapers and phonograph records and posters and postcards and letters and telegrams ("Sorry about the phone call, I'll call back when I have something to say") and notes and invitations and Christmas cards and junk mail and flyers and used plane tickets and bills and receipts and coupons and exhibition catalogues and photographs and résumés and screenplays and a couple of drawings and even a few uncashed checks. "We've found cash in some of them too," Smith says. "And contracts and agreements. Often times, going through them raises more questions than it answers." —RICHARD RUBIN

THE APOCALYPSE OF ADOLESCENCE

This spring one of two Vermont teenagers charged with the knifing murder of two Dartmouth College professors will go on trial. The case offers entry to a disturbing subject—acts of lethal violence committed by “ordinary” teenagers from “ordinary” communities, teenagers who have become detached from civic life, saturated by the mythic violent imagery of popular culture, and consumed by the dictates of some private murderous fantasy

BY RON POWERS

Illustrations by Marc Yankus

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Easing around a curve along Route 110, about eight miles north of Tunbridge, Vermont, one is likely to be transfixed—wounded, almost—by the prospect that sweeps into view: a plain and weathered yet elegant New England village undulates for half a mile along a thoroughfare, hardly wider than a couple of house lots on either side. Lining the road are manicured playing fields, a spare and handsome town hall, a century-old white frame church (Congregational-Methodist), a couple of school buildings, a harness shop, two greens, the county courthouse, stately houses of brick and wood, a modest restaurant, and a gas station. Steep mountains press in on either side of the village, and arcing through its western flank is a splendid little stream. More stately houses are visible halfway up the slope of the western mountain, tucked among pine trees. To the east a pine wilderness hovers above the town, giving way at the southern edge to a nearly vertical cemetery, its oldest tombstones commemorating Union dead. This is Chelsea, Vermont, the shire town of Orange County, chartered on August 4, 1781, population 1,250. It scarcely has the look of a town that would breed teenage killers.

Americans want to believe in towns like Chelsea. My wife and I moved to Vermont from New York City in 1988, in search of such a place. We came here for several reasons, but coloring all of them was the hope of raising our two young sons in the safety and harmony of a tight-knit town community. It wasn't an unreasonable expectation. In the 1980s and 1990s, as the nation's celebrated “rural rebound” established itself, Vermont had been ranked at or near the top of America's “safest” and “most livable” states. Vermont's largest city, Burlington, was singled out as a “Dream Town” (*Outside* magazine), received a City Livability Award (the

U.S. Conference of Mayors), and was designated a “kid-friendly city” (Zero Population Growth). The state was recognized for its superior air quality by the Corporation for Enterprise Development. These surveys drew heavily on the perceived needs of children. Public safety headed almost every list of desirable characteristics. Other leading indicators were pupil-teacher ratios in the public schools, high school graduation rates, funding levels for the arts and for education in general, marriage and divorce rates, and birth rates among teenagers. And underlying all of this was the fact that happy children and Vermont are linked in American myth, in large part because Norman Rockwell, who lived in the town of Arlington, Vermont, for fifteen years, employed local boys and girls as models for his illustrations of leapfrogging, flag-saluting, Christmas-caroling American children.

According to a survey conducted in 1995, 41 percent of the U.S. population would eventually like to move to a small town or rural area. Not everybody can do it, of course; the potential loss of livelihood is usually too great a risk. But for those who try it, Vermont offers many sources of replenishment. A tiny state (9,609 square miles), it is sparsely populated, with fewer than 600,000 people. Its annual tourist flow dwarfs the local population. The heart of the state lies in remote mountain villages like Chelsea. Parents sometimes practice small-scale farming, or teach, or work as artisans, or join in the kind of “home economics” envisioned by the essayist Wendell Berry: a cooperative effort to maintain a purely local system of life. The children—well, the children, being the point of it all, are expected to mature smoothly into thoughtful, self-reliant adults, at peace with themselves and with the world.

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Those are the expectations. If, indeed, the prospects for a happy childhood remain alive and well in havens like Vermont, they might imply a model of sorts for the many people in this country who have an anxious relationship with their children.

But what if they do not?

THE ZANTOP MURDERS

Last year, on a wintry Saturday, January 27, a popular academic couple at Dartmouth College, in Hanover, New Hampshire, just across the Connecticut River from Vermont, made preparations for a dinner party, one of many they had hosted in their house on the woodsy slopes of Etna, a town a few miles from Hanover. Both were German immigrants. They had made their house a salon for faculty members, students, and visitors to the college. Susanne Zantop, who was fifty-five, was the chair of the Department of German Studies. Her husband, Half, sixty-two, was a professor of earth sciences. At around six that evening the first dinner guest arrived. Venturing inside, she discovered Half and Susanne lying in their own blood in their study. They had been repeatedly stabbed in the head, neck, and chest.

Over the three weeks following the attack, as the police combed the region but kept silent about the progress of the investigation, Dartmouth students and Hanover townspeople struggled against fear. Nearly everyone assumed that the killer remained in the vicinity—a troubled student, perhaps, or a faculty rival. A suspicious figure was spotted lurking around dormitories. A suspicious car with out-of-state license plates was reported. Members of the national media converged on the town, filled local hotel rooms, invaded Dartmouth dorms with cameras and notepads, seeking leads, quotations, rumors, irony. When the FBI joined the investigation, the range of conjecture went national and then international. Theories of a Holocaust tie-in circulated: the Zantops were political liberals who often argued that their native country should be more forthright in confronting the evils of its Nazi past. Had they been murdered by a vengeful neo-Nazi?

On February 16 the New Hampshire attorney general announced that an arrest warrant had at last been issued: not for a troubled member of the Dartmouth community but for a seventeen-year-old boy, Robert Tulloch, from Chelsea, about thirty miles north of Hanover. Three days later Robert and his sixteen-year-old friend Jimmy Parker were arrested a little before dawn at a truck stop in New Castle, Indiana. The police there had picked up a truck driver's CB radio call soliciting a ride for two young hitchhikers he was carrying, who were intent on making it to California. Robert was the president of his student council. Jimmy was an artistic youth who played the bass guitar and acted in school plays.

Robert and Jimmy, it turned out, both had families who had come to Vermont in pursuit of the dream of harmony. John Parker, a native of Poughkeepsie, New York, and his

wife, Joan, who was reared in San Diego, had arrived in Chelsea about twenty-five years earlier. "They literally picked Chelsea out on a map," a neighbor who knows them well told me recently. John, educated at Ohio Wesleyan University, had taken up carpentry, at which he excelled. Over the years he had either built or renovated many of the houses in Chelsea. He chaired the Chelsea Recreation Committee, which secured the money and the unbilled labor to create the manicured fields at the southern entrance to the town, and he did much of the manicuring himself—regularly watering the grass and cutting it with a riding mower. He also built the town picnic shelter.

Robert Tulloch's parents had arrived from Florida to take up residence in Vermont. They had lived in Chelsea for about nine years. His father, Michael, was a furniture maker, a specialist in Windsor chairs. His mother, Diane, was a nurse affiliated with the Visiting Nurse Association, a group with connections to the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical



Center. Her neighbors knew her as a gentle mother of four, a maker of soap, a raiser of chickens—"very granola," in the words of one.

But the nurturing virtues of small-town Vermont life failed to ennoble Robert and Jimmy. According to the prosecution, the two entered the Zantop household armed with keenly sharpened foot-long SOG Seal 2000 combat knives. Attacking the couple in the small confines of their study, the boys allegedly hacked away at them, slashing repeatedly at their heads, necks, and chests. The knives later turned up in Robert's bedroom, bearing traces of blood that provided a DNA match with that of Susanne Zantop. Internet records revealed that Jimmy had bought the knives just weeks earlier. A fingerprint on a chair at the Zantop home was identified as Robert's. A boot print in the house matched a boot belonging to Robert. And blood found on the floor mat of a 1996 Subaru registered to Jimmy's parents revealed Susanne Zantop's DNA. A car of similar descrip-

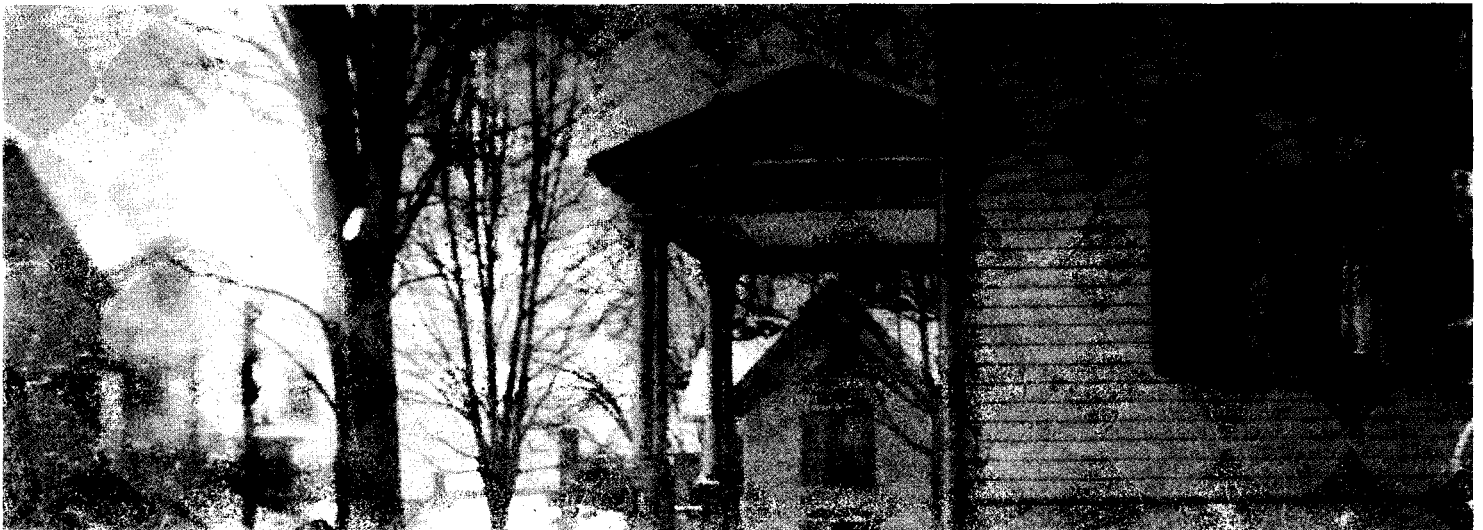
tion had been sighted earlier at the scene of the crime. Jimmy has pled guilty to one count of second-degree murder and will testify at Robert's trial, which is scheduled for this spring. Robert is charged with two counts of first-degree murder.

A CLUSTER OF ASSAULTS

In their untroubled small-town habitat, and in the apparent absence of any motivating passions, Robert Tulloch and Jimmy Parker may come to be seen as representatives of a new mutation in the evolution of the murderous American adolescent. In this mutation the murderers' victims tend not to be the denizens of an urban war zone. Instead the victims are likely to be people living quietly in small towns or suburbs—unoffending partners in the social order. The young attackers are part of this order, indistinguishable from it—until, that is, they emerge one day, inventively armed and intent on carrying out some private fantasy.

tattoo shop, where Bernier, who was expecting to sell them a marijuana pipe, let them in after closing hours. The two assailants attacked him, one of them using a heavy, curved, and extremely sharp combat knife known as a Gurkha. The knife's blade was driven into each of Bernier's eyes. One of the thrusts penetrated to the back of his skull.

Early one evening in late May of 1999 Jane Hubbard, a fifty-nine-year-old British expatriate who over the years had supervised a succession of foster children in her rural cottage, at the edge of Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, lay dozing in her living room. Hubbard, a mild woman whose other pursuits included selling books and raising horses, was awakened by two of her charges, boys who were fifteen and fourteen. They called her into the kitchen and demanded her car keys. When she refused, one of them told her to take off her glasses—so that he wouldn't cut his hand when he punched her, she recalled his saying. He struck her three times while the other boy held her down.



When the details of such crimes become known, the killers' motives, if they can be determined at all, usually turn out to be trivial grudges, hardly worth the outrageous crime or the lifetime of punishment to be endured. What is particularly unhooking about these killings is that they are planned without obvious motivation and are marked by the coldest kind of contempt for the victims.

The Zantops' murders are not unique in Vermont's recent history. A cluster of assaults, less publicized but similar in nature, have disrupted the state's tranquillity in recent years.

In November of 1997 Dwayne Bernier, the owner of a tattoo shop on a rural highway outside Rutland, Vermont, was found stabbed to death in his shop. Two local teenagers, one eighteen and the other sixteen at the time, were eventually convicted of the killing. The older boy, needing money to make his car payments, had recruited the sixteen-year-old to help him, and had invited a fourteen-year-old to come along and watch. The three drove to the

"I've never seen anything swell that fast," the puncher idly remarked to his accomplice. "Just like in the movies."

One of the boys slashed her in the shoulder with a kitchen knife. Then the two began calmly to debate the most efficient way of finishing her off. If they killed her at the house, they agreed, the body would be found too quickly.

The older boy suddenly became very agitated and threw a chair at her. Then they hustled Hubbard out to her blue Saturn, and shoved her into the passenger seat. One boy drove while the other held the knife to her throat. About five miles from the house the boys decided that they wouldn't kill her after all—they "chickened out," they later told the police. Instead they pushed her out of the car and into a ditch. Bleeding, she waited in a field by the ditch until she felt it was safe to seek help. Eventually she was picked up by a passing driver.

After dumping Hubbard, the boys drove to a relative's house, where they gathered some shotguns, a rifle, and am-

munition. They planned to sell the guns for pocket money and then visit some friends in New York. They were arrested after midnight, near the Vermont–New York border, when a traffic accident forced their car to a halt. A trooper at the scene had peered inside the Saturn and seen the concealed bundle of guns, the knife, and blood on the passenger seat. The older boy explained his motive to the trooper later. “If you had to listen to that British voice,” he said with a laugh, “you’d want to kill her too.”

A friend of Jane Hubbard’s told the police that she was familiar with the young perpetrators. “These were kids who wore their bicycle helmets,” she said. The woman remarked on how gentle the boys had seemed with the animals at a local stable.

A similar assault, in February of 2000, was far worse. Early on a weekday morning a West Burke man named Randy Beer was taking a shower when he heard something go *pop* in another room in his house. Drying himself off and investigating, Beer found his seventeen-year-old foster son holding Beer’s .22-caliber rifle. Then Beer saw the body of his wife, Victoria, forty-four, a popular seventh-grade teacher in the local school system. The boy had killed her with a single shot to the head. Victoria’s fourteen-year-old stepdaughter—Beer’s daughter—had been looking on.

The boy locked Beer in the basement and stole some cash, and the two teenagers fled in the victim’s red Isuzu Rodeo. Beer managed to free himself two hours later and called the police. A state trooper spotted the Isuzu cruising a street in the nearby town of St. Johnsbury and flipped on his flashing lights. After a high-speed chase the boy pulled over. Later that day the girl allegedly confessed to a state police detective that she and the boy had worked out three separate plans to kill both parents. The reason, she explained, was that they didn’t like Victoria.

A fourth episode touched the circles of my family’s life. Shortly before Christmas in 1999 my wife and I drove from our home to a small town in western Maine, where our oldest son was enrolled in a prep academy. We sat with a crowd of other parents in the school auditorium and watched our son play his guitar in a holiday music program—a program that also included, among other elements, a choir.

After the concert the students dispersed for the holidays. We and our son drove back to Vermont, as did Bill Stanard and his seventeen-year-old son, Laird, one of the boys who had sung in the choir. The Stanards lived in a small town in southeastern Vermont. A few days later we learned that the following night Laird had shot his mother, Paula, to death in the kitchen with a shotgun.

According to a teacher who befriended him in jail, Laird later indicated that he had thought about the killing in advance. His mindset had less to do with hatred than with a mixture of anxiety and frustration. He had developed a fantasy reinforced by the film *American Beauty*, which he had watched several times. The movie offered a vi-

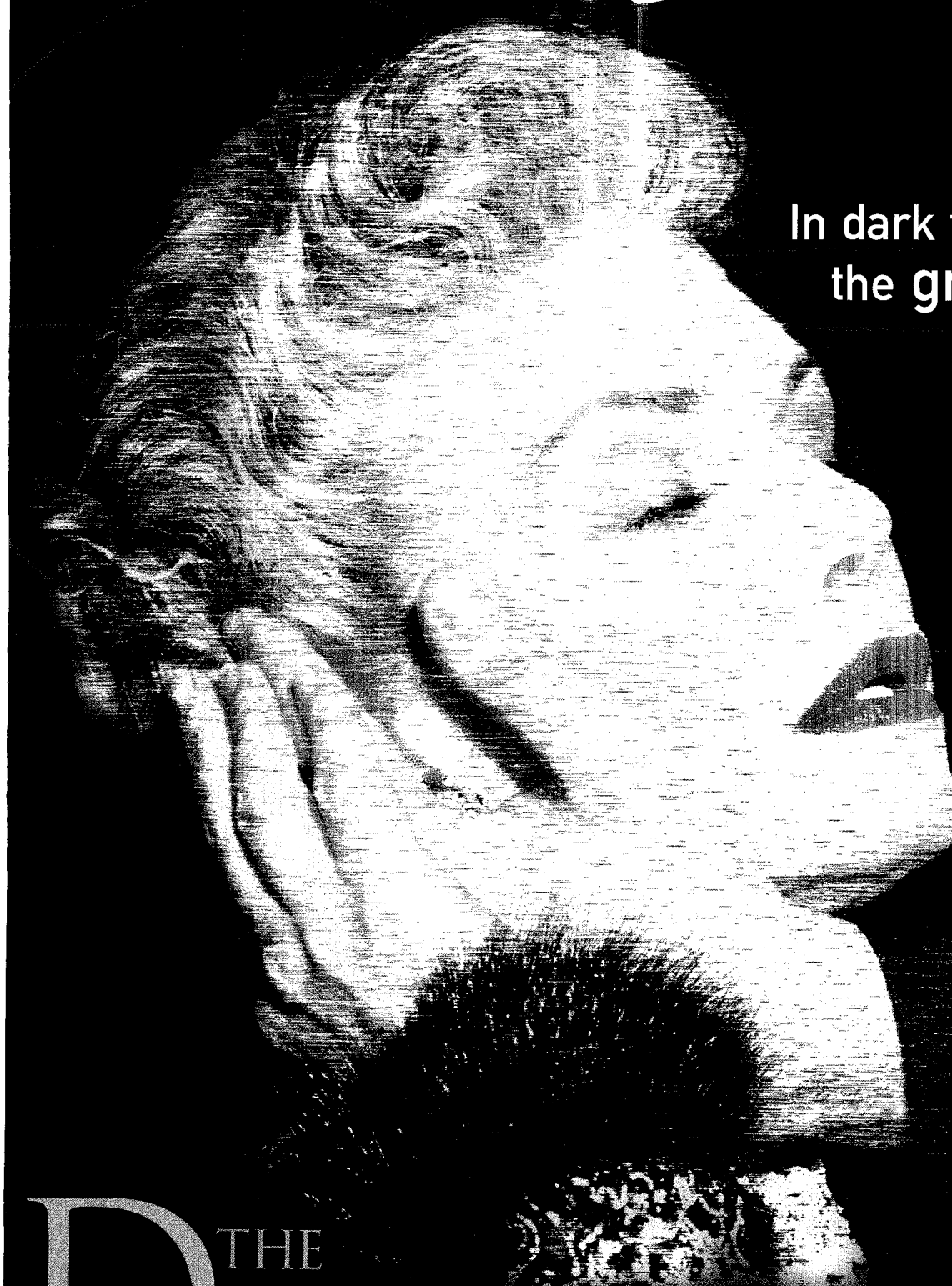
sion of murder as a gift of transcendence, because a character who is killed—an adolescent’s tormented father—does not seem really to die: he narrates the film, commenting on the plot. He is serene, still sensate, hardly inconvenienced by his own demise. The teacher later observed that the only flaw in Laird’s enactment of the plan—the only production hitch in his personal movie—was that after sending his mother into the eternity of voice-over, he had failed in an effort to kill his father. And yet, in the state of half-real, half-imaginary perception he’d worked himself into (a state common to more adolescents than their elders may suspect), it didn’t matter. Laird’s act of murdering his mother seemed to him just another movie scenario. “I *love* my mother,” he insisted to his teacher. “If you saw what I did, you’d understand.”

BEWILDERED CHILDREN

Bewildered, depraved children, behind bars, are a great deal more commonplace in Vermont than national surveys and tourist brochures would have us believe. The plight of children—or, as certain adult Vermonsters demonstrably prefer to look at it, the *inconvenience* of children, the downright *menace* of children—has become a dominant theme of life in the state in the years I have lived there. Although Vermont enjoys one of the lowest crime rates in the nation, and although the region is recovering from a harsh economic slump that hit at the beginning of the 1990s, signs persist that the connections between children and their host culture here are unraveling. Kids are in trouble even here in Vermont. The reasons elude easy explanation.

That an explosion in serious juvenile crime has occurred in Vermont is undeniable. Data gathered by the Vermont Department of Corrections in 1999 revealed that the number of jail inmates aged sixteen to twenty-one had jumped by more than 77 percent in three years. (By that time overcrowding had obliged Vermont to start shipping some of its prisoners off to Virginia and other states.) Vermont’s Department of Corrections reported that it supervised or housed one in ten Vermont males of high school age. The annual DOC budget more than doubled during the 1990s, from \$27 million to more than \$70 million. A report by the northern New England consortium Justiceworks, released in 2000, asserted that “while overall crime rates are down in northern New England, a greater proportion of those crimes are being committed by children under the age of 18.”

Panic-inducing mischief has also become a fact of adolescent daily life. In the year following the April 1999 Columbine massacre Vermont experienced an epidemic of anonymous bomb threats that caused school evacuations up and down the state. The threats grew so routine that the administration at one sizable high school in the southeastern part of the state installed a voice message for people who telephoned the school during a crisis: “We’re sorry, but we



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cannot take your call now, due to an evacuation.” Police guards, uniformed and armed, became fixtures in many of Vermont’s public schools. In February of last year a seventeen-year-old named Bradley Bell, from Milton, Vermont, was arrested for manufacturing pipe bombs in his house. County prosecutors said their information indicated that Bell might have intended to plant the bombs at the high school. As of this writing, this case has not come to trial.

The number of dropouts in the state’s public schools showed an increase of nearly 50 percent in the 1990s—from 1,060 in 1992 to 1,585 in 1998. Meanwhile, admissions to Corrections Education, a program run for adolescent offenders by the state’s Department of Corrections, grew in 1998 from 160 in June to 220 in November. The number of young people without a high school diploma in the “corrections” population increased from 87 percent to 93 percent from 1987 to 1998.

Heroin addiction was virtually unknown among Vermont children as recently as three years ago, but by 2000 heroin abuse was an established crisis throughout the state, and by early last year the volume of confiscated heroin had increased fourfold since 1999. Young addicts turned up in nearly every town of substantial size. Newspapers began reporting deaths resulting from overdose. Last September the police in Winooski, which borders Burlington, arrested an eighteen-year-old and charged him with dealing heroin from an apartment next door to a school. The police said they had found 397 bags of the narcotic in his possession.

“Heroin is almost as easy to get in Burlington as a gallon of maple syrup,” *The Burlington Free Press* reported in February of 2001. The same edition of the paper chronicled a horrifying heroin-related story about a sixteen-year-old Burlington girl, Christal Jones, who had been found murdered a month earlier in a Bronx apartment. A runaway and sometime ward of the state’s social-services agencies, Christal had developed a heroin habit that led her into prostitution. She was one of several young Vermont women drawn into the prostitution ring of a Burlington hustler with connections in New York.

AN ADOLESCENT ARMY OF OCCUPATION

On our arrival in Vermont, my wife and I settled in Middlebury, in the Champlain Valley, near the state’s western border. We took up teaching careers at Middlebury College, from which we emerged after a few years into more congenial pursuits. We watched our boys and our friends’ children flourish in a sunlit world of safe neighborhoods and committed schoolteachers. It was a world in which guests at a dinner were likely to haul out guitars after dessert was cleared away, in which the baseball coach doubled as the Baptist minister and store saleswomen remembered kids’ shoe sizes better than their parents did. Both our sons quickly learned to say “The usual” at the breakfast diner across the street from the green. They swam for the town

team in the summer, skied the Green Mountains in the winter, and cycled the local streets and roads with a freedom unimaginable in a city or a suburb. One day, as we strolled past a storefront with a fresh coat of bright-green paint, my older son, then about eight, actually groused, “Pretty soon they’ll have this town so changed you won’t even recognize it!” We hadn’t yet sensed the deeper changes taking place.

On a winter day in 1994, leafing through a pile of student essays that mostly dealt, as usual, with the exalted anorectic-alcoholic reveries of the corporate ruling class’s daughters and sons, I found a paper on a different topic, turned in by a working-class student from Vermont. She had written about an incident in her home town, Rutland, some thirty miles to the south: a night-time street battle, involving beer bottles and baseball bats, between local kids and a coterie of newcomers distinguished by their red berets, baggy clothes, and Hispanic surnames.

This was how I discovered that urban youth gangs had arrived in Vermont. Soon everyone knew. Trickling into the state from played-out industrial cities in Connecticut and Massachusetts, on the run from rivals and sensing a virgin market for their contraband, members of gangs with names like Los Solidos, La Familia, and Latin Kings had rented houses in towns throughout the state, and had begun recruiting locally. The violent resistance by the teens in Rutland, it soon grew clear, had been an exception: a lot of Vermont boys and girls seemed delighted by the newcomers. Soon everyone was reading about town kids who joined with the young crime lords to open up new markets for marijuana, cocaine, and, as became clear a few years later, heroin. Dozens of adolescents left their working-class families to get “beaten in” to gang membership. They learned new skills: extortion in the public schools, for instance, and running a drug-dealing route—or, in the case of girls, providing lodging, parents’ credit cards, and, occasionally, sex for the visitors. Arrested and incarcerated alongside their new mentors, the local teens helped to convert the state’s jails, which absorbed a 600 percent increase in gang-member inmates from 1995 to 1996, into thriving gang recruitment centers.

Nothing since the countercultural invasion of the 1960s had produced such a shock within the state. Police departments formed gang task forces and hustled their personnel off to urban seminars on gang menace and management. The public-safety commissioner warned that the state would be unable to combat its growing gang problem without federal assistance.

The psychological border separating Vermont from everywhere else, it seemed, had crumbled, and with it the old pieties about the state as a haven for the rearing of children. Vermont was just one more piece of American turf claimed by an adolescent army of occupation: the 25,000 distinct gangs, comprising more than 650,000 members, that were operating throughout the country. According to

the National Youth Gang Center, every American state reported gang problems in the 1990s, as did half of all cities and towns with populations under 25,000.

In Vermont new task forces eventually crushed the gangs (or drove them underground) with paramilitary efficiency: surveillance, infiltration by informants, physically rough interrogations, and night-time phone calls to the parents of suspected gang members. The scare headlines gradually disappeared, and everyone pretty much went back to behaving as if nothing big had happened—everyone except the children. Few Vermonters were inclined to ask a question that their state's communal ethos should have rendered inescapable: What had made the gangs so attractive to their children in the first place? Few paid attention to a common explanation offered by local kids, on the rare occasions when they were asked: they saw the gangs as a replacement for something missing in their lives—namely, a community that satisfied their longings for worth-proving ritual, meaningful action in the service of a cause, and psychological intimacy.

Some months after all the excitement had ebbed, I mentioned my bewilderment at the gangs' successful penetration of Vermont to Chris Frappier, an investigator with the state public defender's office. Frappier is a cheerful fellow with a beard and an earring who himself grew up poor in a small Vermont town. "There's good within the gangs," he said with a shrug, as if stating the obvious. "They take care of each other. There's bad boys, there's less bad boys—there's a continuum. They come up here to Vermont to chill out, or because there's not as many cops. And who's waiting for them? Our kids. Our kids, the MTV generation. To them, these guys look like TV stars! So *our* kids, *our* children, who feel lost, disenfranchised—they join up! And why not? They don't have enough support services in this state. I mean, look at the communities. Look at the communities in this state that wage war on their youth. You've got Vergennes, kicking kids out of the park. You've got Woodstock banning skateboarding." The detective grew more heated as he spoke. "What I'm seeing in recent years is the total and complete alienation of youth," he said. "And it is not coming from them; it's coming from the adults who aren't bothering to reach out to them. And it is terrifying. Straight hedonistic drugs and music and misogyny. I walk Church Street in Burlington and I see kids that are walking dead and know it. And that is the biggest change of my lifetime in Vermont."

THE LANGUAGE OF APOCALYPSE

Theo Padnos is a slightly clerkish-looking man of thirty-four, small and pale, whose horn-rimmed glasses and mop of curly, uncombed hair make it easy not to notice the wiry mountain-biker's sinews in his arms and legs. It's easy not to notice Padnos's presence at all, in fact, which is the way he likes it, especially when he is doing what he does best: paying acute attention.

Padnos is a former bicycle-shop salesman and telemarketer who often has had trouble finding a suitable job. He has a Ph.D. in comparative literature, which he earned in June of 2000 from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, but this has not helped him much in his quest for employment. He can be impressive in ticking off the list of university teaching jobs throughout the United States and Canada for which he has applied without success.

A couple of years ago, desperate for an income and hungry to teach something to somebody, Padnos applied for a part-time job teaching literature to adolescents in the Community High School of Vermont, a program administered by the state's Department of Corrections. Its pupils are inmates in the prison system. Padnos was assigned to the regional correctional facility in Woodstock, on the state's southeastern border—just across the Connecticut River from Hanover. The facility, built in 1935 and scheduled for abandonment by the corrections system this spring, is wedged between an auto-parts outlet and a convenience store on the unfashionable eastern edge of a fashionable town. Its exterior, red brick and whitewashed wooden trim, evokes a schoolhouse. Its interior, in the words of the state's commissioner of corrections, evokes "a James Cagney movie": it's an antiquated warren of locked metal doors, Plexiglas monitoring windows, and iron grillwork, with gray paint and a prevailing odor—diluted by disinfectant—of burned meat from the cafeteria. Its capacity is seventy-five inmates. Its superintendent says he "hates" to see the population rise above eighty. About half are convicted adult felons, the other half kids awaiting trial. The two populations mix indiscriminately. Padnos taught in a basement classroom there for thirteen months.

Teachers in the Vermont correctional system are offered several layers of protection from their charges: surveillance cameras in the classrooms, walkie-talkies they can clip to their belts, classroom doors left open to allow fast entry by guards in case of trouble. Most teachers accept the full inventory, but Padnos rejected everything. His motives had less to do with bravado than with practical concerns, he told me when we spoke recently. "I got rid of the camera, I let the inmates close and lock the door, and I even allowed them to expel the jail snitches if they wanted to," he said. "I allowed this because, as a teacher in the liberal arts, I try to humanize my students. I was interested in staging an intimate, private encounter with literature, and I thought that a measure of privacy and separation from the inhuman jail would help."

Padnos found himself inside a compacted sampling of the sub-population from which the deliverers of sudden violence have lately been emerging: the young, the male, the white, the angry, the ignored, the overstimulated, the intelligent if not well educated. The dangerous dreamers. Most of his charges were in for mid-level crimes such as drug use, assault, and robbery. If they had lacked for attentive adult mentors in the outside world, they now lived at close

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Lunch of David Tillson, portfolio manager at

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quarters with plenty of them: adult rapists, gang members, and murderers. Although largely poor and from rural communities, these young inmates represented a range of social classes in Vermont, a rural state that is laced with pockets of poverty. With one eminent exception, they had not yet broken through to the level of crime that stops the larger world in its tracks. But as Padnos quickly came to perceive, such an achievement preoccupied most of them. It formed their imaginative agendas. "They're fascinated by the details of their crimes," he told me, "and by violence in general. Violent crime is the one topic to which they can devote sustained concentration. When my classes touched on this subject, as almost all jail classes eventually do, they became a kind of seminar. Everyone was well informed, everyone felt entitled to participate, and everyone was prepared to teach something. When I asked the students how often they read the police files they carried with them to class—all the witness statements, the blood and ballistics analyses the prosecution had turned over to the defense—they would say, 'All the time. Over and over. And over.'"

Arranging their future crimes was the long-term extra-curricular project that kept them busy, Padnos learned, and they received constant guidance and reinforcement from the hardened jailbirds in their midst. "The parole and probation people may have thought they had these kids in their radar," he told me, "but the kids were already thinking way beyond rehabilitation. They weren't talking about getting jobs, going back to school, anything like that. It was through crime that they intended to reintroduce themselves to the world."

The facility's superintendent, William R. Anderson, backs up Padnos's observations. He told me that although instances of violent crime in Vermont had not increased in recent years, the severity of violence had intensified "significantly." "I'm seeing something in young people coming into jail today I've never seen before," he said. "The seventeen-, eighteen-, nineteen-year-old kids I see, they don't care about anything, including themselves. They have absolutely no respect for any kind of authority. They have no direction in their lives whatsoever. They're content to come back to jail time after time after time."

Into this context Padnos brought an ambitious syllabus: James Baldwin, Edgar Allan Poe, Cormac McCarthy, Flannery O'Connor, Mark Twain. "I wanted to teach them to imagine themselves in the situations of others in similar predicaments," he said. "I wanted to show them that they are not the *isolatos* they take themselves for. What they are going through is not unique to them; these struggles have been experienced and written about all through history."

As he thinks back on it now, Padnos concedes that aside from a few scattered, near accidental moments when the literature, the students, and his instruction coalesced, his course was a failure. "They were too far gone by the time they arrived in prison," he said. "This was true of the middle-

class, public high school, bomb-threatening kids; it was even true of the well-educated preppie kids. And their experience in prison pushed most of them even further away from any hope for involvement with a civil, productive life. Just once in a while I saw it happen: they'd relate to something I'd brought them to read or talk about, and for a few minutes they'd be transformed into children—wide-eyed, frightened, hopelessly lost. Then a jailer would give a knock, tell 'em time was up, and that moment would be over."

But something else began to happen in those jagged sessions, a transformation that Padnos had not anticipated. The jailed kids, gradually and roughly, came to accept him as one of themselves. The key to the process, he believes, was his jettisoning of the classroom safeguards. None of the other teachers had dared to let go of those, and their refusal amounted to a statement of irreducible fear, disgust, and membership in the target world. Padnos's students made him prove that he meant the gesture: they sized him up, shouted him down, mocked his questions, cursed and tried to intimidate him for a while. They demanded to know why anybody like him would spend time in jail if he didn't have to.

Padnos became a player under inmates' rules. He believes that his youthfulness helped, and also his unconcealed affinity for the outlaw point of view. "I have an attraction to people who don't mind causing offense," he told me. "People who are disappointments to themselves, and whose families don't know how to account for them." Whatever the reasons, when the layers of distrust had burned away, Padnos found himself privy to, and taking part in, conversations of the sort that usually unspool only among the dispossessed, and only in those moments when they feel they are free from interlopers, secure with their own kind.

What Padnos began hearing in these conversations, he says, was the language of apocalypse. "The goal for the bright ones is to truly mesmerize the middle class with violence," he told me. "They've been transfixed by disaster themselves—in their families, at the movies, in the company of their mentors in crime. They've come to feel that there's nothing out there for them. And so they know exactly the effect they're looking for. They keep up with the news. They read about their deeds in the papers. They've been ignored all their lives, and they're pleased to see that the public is finally giving them some of the attention they're due. The papers always describe their crimes as 'senseless,' and 'meaningless,' and 'unmotivated,' and these kids themselves always come off as 'cold' and 'distant' to the reporters. The details of their crimes are always covered with the tightest possible focus, as if meaning might be found there. The result is just what they'd been hoping for: terrifying, mesmerizing violence, and no context."

Padnos, who is writing a book about his experiences, hardly endorses this violence. His classroom goal, in fact, had been to transmute the violent impulse into a quest for self-

understanding through the medium of literature. He had hoped, in the best postgraduate fashion, that through a guided reading of “The Cask of Amontillado,” or *Cities of the Plain*, he might awaken his young charges to the healing awareness that their torments are part of the human condition.

Instead Padnos found himself becoming a student in a different kind of seminar. Listening to the boys in his classroom, he began to comprehend that the deeds they had committed, and the language with which they described future deeds, amounted to a text that American society has so far stubbornly resisted decoding. The message Padnos found embedded in this text is that in a world otherwise stripped of meaning and self-identity, adolescents can come to understand violence itself as a morally grounded gesture, a kind of purifying attempt to intervene against the nothingness.

“They’re a community of believers, in a way,” he told me. “They come from all kinds of backgrounds. But what unites them are these apocalyptic suspicions that they have.

kids—is soaked in myths about outlaws, self-reliance. People traveling a rough landscape that is their true home. People who mete out justice to anyone who impinges on their native liberties. Post-apocalyptic heroes, just like they want to be—violent, suicidal, the sort of people who are preparing themselves for what happens after everything ends.

“These kids half believe that their destination is the same as these screen heroes. That it’s something like the roadside shantytown in *Mad Max*. They devour *Taxi Driver*, especially the Travis Bickle speech in which he prophesies a great rain and promises that it will wash the streets of their scum. They relate to the themes in *Terminator II* and *The Postman*. And *Reservoir Dogs*, and *Wild Things*. These were practically our class canon.” Padnos thought for a minute. “I admire my students,” he said. “Sometimes I wish that I had the courage they have. I just think of them as passionate, thoughtful, lucid, well-informed, literate, morally sophisticated, homicidal all-American kids.”



They think and act as though it’s an extremely late hour in the day, and nothing much matters anymore. A lot of them are suicidal. Most of them see themselves as frustrated travelers. Solitary wayfarers. They’ve done things that have broken them off from their past and set off on the open road. Eventually they got arrested. This may be hard for some people to swallow, I guess, but they talk about their crimes almost as if they were acts of faith. Maybe these kids themselves wouldn’t use those words. But the things they’ve done, on some level, strike me as almost ecstatic attempts to vault over the shabby facts of their everyday lives. They haven’t read much. But some of them, the more down-and-out ones especially, read the Book of Revelation a lot.”

These kids also watch a lot of movies and TV. No surprise there. But it’s what they extract from these sources that engrosses Padnos. “They’re drawn to the myths built into these violent movies, not just the violence itself,” he said. “Prison life, especially for kids—maybe life in general for

LAIRD’S STORY

Into Padnos’s classroom one crisp January day in 2000, “full of prep-school chumminess,” as Padnos remembers it, walked the plump and fair-skinned seventeen-year-old Laird Stanard, who a few weeks earlier had murdered his mother with a shotgun. “The story had been in every newspaper, and on every local news broadcast in Vermont,” Padnos said. “All the prisoners knew about it. So here came Laird, circulating in the jail’s general population, available to anyone who felt like eviscerating a kid who had just killed his mother.”

Padnos had a ringside seat, as it were, for the boy’s introduction to jail life—to the rest of his life. “They were waiting for him,” he recalled. “I hadn’t figured out why eighteen students were suddenly keen on coming to my class. They filled every chair in the room. As soon as he walked through the door they were yelling, ‘All right! Here he is! The man!’ I remember how addled Laird was, how indignant. His whole attitude was ‘Me? Shoot my mother? Hey, I’m as

distraught as anyone! What the fuck are you talking about?”

Padnos found himself helpless to prevent the cruelly comic initiation that followed. The class kingpin, a fleshy character whom Padnos refers to as Slash, took charge. “She’s your mother, for God’s sake, kid!” he yelled at Laird. “I just don’t get that. I mean, she’s your own goddamn mother! What are you going to do? ‘Hi, Mom—*KA-BOOM!*’ I mean, come on! *KA-BOOM!*” Padnos remembers the raucous laughter that spread through the classroom. “*KA-POW! BAM!* Take that, bitch!” More laughter. Padnos ruefully recalls laughing a bit himself. Other kids took up the patter: “Hey, Mom! Present for ya. *KA-BOOM!*” “Wasn’t she your own mother, for Christ’s sakes?”

Through it all Laird sat in shocked silence, his jaw locked. Still not clear in his own mind about what he had done, he had apparently steeled himself to endure whatever this new environment offered. He had come into the room cheerfully prepared, with his prep-school notes, to discuss Edgar Allan Poe. In the days that followed, Padnos watched Laird try to make sense of where he was. The boy offered up his credentials to the new people in his life—almost, it struck Padnos, as a tourist might in a place far from home. The other prisoners ignored him.

Padnos did not. He forged a friendship with Laird, who was desperately receptive. “We were similar,” Padnos said. “We knew the same types of people, our parents were similar people, we’re both prep-school kids. We were both overwhelmed by the thugs in this jail, and we both wanted to establish a civilized island in that uncivil world.” Over the course of several intimate conversations Padnos saw Laird’s denial slowly dissolve. He began to hear the authentic voice of an unformed, unfinished adolescent trying to explain why he had done what he had done.

Laird’s story was not the sort that is usually told in attempts to reconstruct a motive after vaguely similar adolescent killings. There were no easy formulations here about the effects of bullies, or drugs, or a predisposition to violence. His account was at once more disjointed and far more specific than that. Padnos recalls it as the story of a confused boy whose parents were thwarting him. The Stanard family lived in a renovated farmhouse on several acres of land off a rural thoroughfare called Blood Hill Road. His parents raised sheep and horses. Laird’s father, Bill, had taught in both public and private high schools. He had been a naval officer in Vietnam. He had given his son gun training. Laird’s mother, Paula, the daughter of a wealthy family, had been the boy’s strongest ally. Laird recounted fond memories of the two of them smoking cigarettes together and talking about life.

According to Padnos, Laird did not want to go home to West Windsor with his father the night of the holiday music program at his school. He wanted to visit a girl he liked in Maine. But his father insisted that they return to the house on Blood Hill Road.

On the following night Laird left the house without notifying his parents, taking a shotgun and a family car. He went to a rural nightclub in the area, called Destiny, where he sat smoking cigarettes and watching people dance. When he returned home, at one o’clock, Paula Stanard was indignantly waiting for him. She and Laird quarreled briefly. Then Laird leveled the shotgun, which he had concealed behind him, and killed her with one shot. When his father came stumbling down the stairs at the sound of the report, Laird tried to complete the double murder he had contemplated, but in his panic he misfired. He lurched out the door to the car and spun down the driveway, striking a snowbank, the mailbox, and a tree. He drove six miles to a party at a ski resort. At the party he pressed a wild story on several people: he had picked up a hitchhiker in the middle of the night, and the hitchhiker had forced his way into the Stanard house and shot his mother. “His plan was a movie plan,” Padnos told me. “He thought he would live with his girlfriend, off on the lam someplace, with his dad’s shotgun and his mother’s credit card to help them get around.” One of the people who listened to Laird’s story called the police. It took the local police four days to arrive at the truth.

In the weeks and months following Laird’s arrival, Padnos watched as Laird developed a kind of sangfroid in his new role as a criminal. “He started giving me reports,” Padnos said, “on what it was like to live in a world where he was at the center of attention. He claimed to have movie projects in the works, and he tended to know people who appeared in the news personally. Other criminals.”

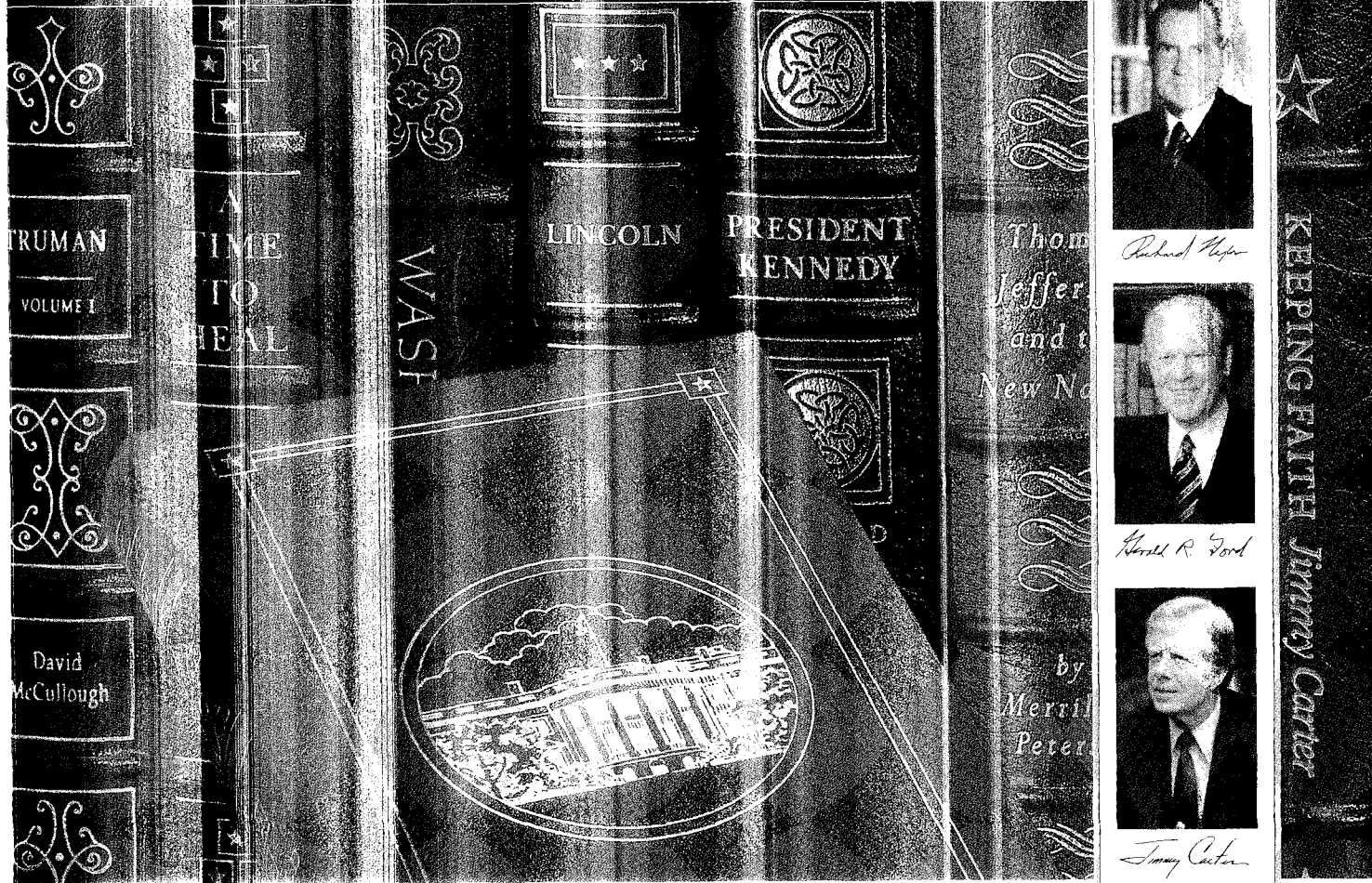
WHO KNOWS?

Last summer Laird Stanard accepted a deal: in return for a plea of guilty to charges of murdering his mother and attempting to murder his father, he was given sentences of twenty-five years to life and, concurrently, twenty years to life. Theo Padnos testified at the sentencing hearing and wrote to me about it.

What a strange scene it was. Laird’s dad ... [and his] mom’s family [were] there, as were a bunch of neighbors and former teachers and reporters. The funny thing was that during the intermissions when the spectators ambled around outside the courtroom, the whole thing felt like a happy waspy cocktail party. We all knew a bit about one another—“Oh, you’re Theo,” people said to me, and smiled ...

Laird was in a good mood too. He was the center of attention. When I testified, I kept trying to get up and leave the witness box before I was really supposed to go, and this was amusing to everyone in the courtroom but especially amusing to Laird. (I didn’t wait for the DA or the judge to ask their questions.) The judge laughed, I laughed, everyone smiled. When the DA asked me if Laird fully understood “the enormity” of what he’s done, I wanted to say that yes, I think he understands that enormity more than the rest of us, because he has nightmares all the time, because he sometimes sleeps twenty hours a day, because

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he sometimes sits in class absolutely terrified by what we're reading. And the rest of us are amusing ourselves at a cocktail party. But of course I wasn't thinking like that. Instead I just said that I thought that the consequences of the crime couldn't be fully appreciated yet by him but that he was making progress.

The other funny thing was that the defense psychiatrist testified at length in the most somber, lugubrious voice you can imagine about Laird's "borderline personality." Laird had suicidal ideation, he had ADHD and ADD, he had a history of unstable relationships, chronic suicidality (I don't think so), marked reactivity of mood (what? he gets angry easily, I guess), he saw everything in black and white w/o grays, and on and on. This guy was also a great performer. Very solemn and full of technical language. He concluded that when L's mom yelled at him, L overreacted because of his BPD and blew her away with a shotgun. The shrink said that the borderline illness/syndrome had "the most explanatory power" of any of the diagnoses in the DSM IV, the great manual of the psychiatrists, and basically, Laird wasn't well in the head: if anything "caused" the crime, it was this. The judge weighed in later with his own diagnosis. He seemed to feel that what provoked the crime was Laird's mom who made him total up [a large number of] credit card charges by hand, when Laird had difficulty adding. This frustration/humiliation was too much for someone with the borderline personality problem, so he shot her. I don't know what the judge said to himself afterwards, but the shrink, chatting with my fellow jail worker and me on the sidewalk outside the courthouse, said, "I don't have any idea what the reason is, you know? Who knows?"

THEY ARE US

To most people, the notion that an apocalyptic nihilism is taking root in this nation's children will seem alarmist. Much of the evidence can be seen as variations on age-old complaints, familiar generational impasses, and inevitable exceptions to a reassuring general rule: that tranquillity still reigns. After all, are not most kids well-adjusted? Do not the vast majority of them pass through adolescence without episodes of addiction, pregnancy, criminal behavior, self-destruction? Have grown-ups not complained since time immemorial about "kids these days"? And have not kids forever grouched that the adults in their lives don't understand them? Have there not always been instances of violent aggression among a few antisocial delinquents?

Parents who generalize from the apparent contentedness of their own children are indulging a dangerous fallacy. Children, like people in general, present different faces to different groups within their social universes, a state of affairs amply documented by Judith Rich Harris in her important book *The Nurture Assumption* (1998), which illustrated the multiple, often contradictory personas elicited variably by parents, peer groups, siblings, and prevailing societal influences. Equally treacherous is the view that the young have always been inscrutable to adults and have always complained about being misunderstood. Since

the end of World War II adolescents have been chafing against an ever more impervious, unheeding social system. Their outrage has found expression, with increasing intensity, among the inchoate "juvenile delinquents" of the early postwar years, the Beats of the 1950s, the hippies and political radicals of the 1960s, the drug and gangland subcultures of more recent years. And now it's expressed by the kids who carry out school shootings and other acts of vicious and inexplicable violence. The questions we must ask ourselves today, therefore, are these: Why are so many children plotting to blow up their worlds and themselves? For each act of gratuitous violence that is actually carried out, how many unconsummated dark fantasies are transmuted into depression, resignation, or a benumbed withdrawal from participation in civic society?

What we are witnessing is clearly something new. A frightening momentum has been building, and the qualities of generational understanding and assurance that once earned America a worldwide reputation as child-centered are fading fast. And yet despite a growing awareness of this fact, the public policy that we are developing to cope with troubled kids is only exacerbating the situation. Let us leave aside considerations of withering support for public education and inadequate federal support for impoverished working mothers. Let us consider our present policy in its rawest and most adversarial form: in the state's growing arrogation of power to punish rather than to rehabilitate. This is a policy that expresses both fear of and contempt for children.

In the 1990s public figures such as John Ashcroft and William Bennett successfully campaigned to make certain that the juvenile justice system no longer "hugs the juvenile terrorist," in Ashcroft's words. As Margaret Talbot pointed out in *The New York Times Magazine* in September 2000, forty-five states in that decade passed new laws or enacted changes in old ones that toughened criminal justice and criminal penalties for the errant young. Fifteen states transferred to prosecutors from judges the power to choose adult prosecution in certain crimes. Twenty-eight states created statutory requirements for adult trials in some crimes of violence, theft and robbery, and drug use. In 1994 President Clinton's Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act federalized many of the states' initiatives, authorizing adult prosecution of children thirteen and over who were charged with certain serious crimes, and expanding the death penalty to cover some sixty offenses. As Talbot wrote, "The number of youths under 18 held in adult prisons, and in many cases mixed in with adult criminals, has doubled in the last 10 years or so ... to 7,400 in 1997. Of the juveniles incarcerated on any given day, one in 10 are in adult jails or prisons."

These draconian efforts seem to fly in the face of emerging scientific research demonstrating that the brains of children and adolescents are not yet fully formed—not

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yet equipped to make precisely the sort of emotional and rational decisions necessary to restrain impulses in certain situations that can lead to antisocial and criminal behavior. Adolescents, with directed and scrupulous supervision, can indeed change and grow emotionally and psychologically, but our public policy seems intent on denying this possibility. But if the government is in denial, the marketplace is not: with the help of exhaustive behavioral research, corporations have in recent decades spent hundreds of millions of dollars ransacking and exploiting the emotions and thought processes of adolescents and pre-adolescents. RoperASW (with its *Roper Youth Report*), Teenage Research Unlimited, and similar organizations, using methods derived from the behavioral sciences, advise merchandisers and advertising companies on the latest semiotics of “cool” and consumer-friendly subversion. “We understand how teens think, what they want, what they like, what they aspire to be, what excites them, and what concerns them,” the Teenage Research Unlimited Web site brags. What this understanding translates into in the marketplace is hypersexuality, aggression, addiction, coldness, and irony-laced civic disaffection—the very seed-bed of apocalyptic nihilism.

The national task of recentering ourselves and our children will be enormous, and will require painful shifts in our expectations of expediency, personal gratification, and the unfettered accumulation of wealth. But the goals are necessary and anything but obscure. Children crave a sense of self-worth. That craving is answered most readily through respectful inclusion: through a reintegration of our young into the intimate circles of family and community life. We must face the fact that having ceased to exploit children as laborers, we now exploit them as consumers. We must find ways to offer them useful functions, tailored to their evolving capacities. Closely allied to this goal is an expanded definition of “education”—one that ranges far beyond debates over public and private schools and how much to spend on them to embrace an ethic of sustained mentoring that extends from community to personal relationships.

The societal shift of consciousness necessary for such a recentering is—in a pre-apocalyptic context, at least—virtually unthinkable. But America is lately learning to rethink many assumptions it once comfortably took for granted, out of terrorist promptings eerily similar to the bloody messages being delivered by certain of our young.

.....

Briefly, then, back to Vermont. The town of Chelsea, the home of Robert Tulloch and Jimmy Parker, scarcely has the look of a town that would breed teenage killers, for one simple reason—it is not such a town. Chelsea is a place that breeds human beings, whose fates are bound up in the larger forces and energies of the nation. There is no real mystery over the identities and the motivations of Tulloch and Parker, or of Laird Stanard. They are us, and they are ours. ▀

INCIDENT REPORT

Picasso's banquet for Rousseau

.....

At the time of the celebrated homage to the painter Henri Rousseau, in 1908, Pablo Picasso had advanced from his blue period through his rose and into Cubism. He was living with his lady, Fernande, in a tumble-down Montmartre tenement dubbed by his friend Max Jacob the “Bateau Lavoir.” Jacob was one of several poets drawn to the painter; André Salmon was a regular, as was an émigré from the Polish lumpen aristocracy, large in girth and in talent—Guillaume Apollinaire. Georges Braque brought the artist Marie Laurencin, who promptly became Apollinaire's mistress. They were an under-thirty crowd, with shaky incomes and imprudent lifestyles, in contrast to the easy comfort of the rue de Fleurus, where Picasso visited Gertrude Stein and *her* lover, Alice B. Toklas.

It was Apollinaire who had introduced Picasso and Fernande to Rousseau, called “le Douanier” because of the misguided impression that he had been a customs officer. Fernande thought him charming, if naive. Picasso enormously admired the haunting, otherworldly quality of his paintings. On the appointed day he placed one of le Douanier's large, primitive portraits on an easel, and a banner reading “HONNEUR À ROUSSEAU” behind a little throne devised for his guest of honor. Fernande cooked a great quantity of *riz à la Valenciennes* and ordered out for delicacies (which, owing to a misunderstanding, never materialized, but were sufficiently compensated for by a large consumption of aperitifs).

The guests, seated at a long board on trestles, cheered wildly when le Douanier arrived. The *riz* was quickly devoured, after which came speeches and songs, and Fernande recalled that Rousseau was so moved that “he accepted with the greatest stoicism the regular dripping of wax tears on his brow from a huge lantern above him.” Apollinaire delivered a toast: “Here we gather to celebrate your glory, / These wines Picasso pours are in your honor ...,” after which, Gertrude Stein later wrote, Salmon leaped upon the table to recite *his* poem, started a fight, and had to be dragged out. Perhaps to calm things down, Rousseau played on his violin. Marie Laurencin sang old Norman songs in her thin voice. Apollinaire requested native songs of the red Indians from Stein and Toklas, but they did not comply. By 3:00 A.M., when the party broke up, Picasso was satisfied; he had sought a delicate balance—a soupçon of mockery to counter an otherwise sincere admiration—and claimed success. Rousseau, impervious to irony, felt only the love. —NANCY CALDWELL SOREL



THE ICEBERG WARS

*Competition for one of Newfoundland's
chief natural resources heats up*

BY WAYNE CURTIS

.....

"It's right over there where it happened," Cecil Stockley told me as we motored out of the Twillingate harbor aboard the M.V. *Iceberg Alley*. Located on Newfoundland's northern coast, Twillingate not only has a name seemingly borrowed from *The Hobbit*—it has the landscape as well. The treeless hills are woolly with mosses and lichens; in the late afternoon light they appeared as if draped in chenille. All that was lacking was a cloaked figure holding a crooked staff and gazing enigmatically off into the middle distance.

What happened is this: in the summer of 1998 an iceberg floated into the harbor and ran aground. That was not in itself unusual—some summers hundreds of icebergs drift just offshore from Twillingate, and occasionally one or two find their way into the harbor. But what happened next *was* unusual: a barge equipped with a crane loomed from around the headlands, tethered itself to the iceberg, and started noisily and methodically chipping away at it with a device designed for dredging rock. "I think everybody in town was kind of peeved off," said Stockley, who has been running iceberg excursions since 1985. "Here we were, trying to do a boat-tour operation, and people were stealing the iceberg right in front of our eyes."

Iceberg tourism is one of the few new growth industries in Newfoundland, an island still reeling from the collapse of the cod fishery a decade ago. Icebergs are becoming to Newfoundland what wines are to Napa Valley: tourists can be overheard talking about individual specimens in precise yet lofty terms, discussing the cragginess of towers and the sapphire radiance of blue streaks as if comparing rare vintages. Island gift shops sell framed photos of especially charismatic icebergs; the shots have the gauzy, soft-focus feel of cheesy studio photos.

But as the incident in Twillingate suggests, icebergs have lately attracted the notice of another business: the extractive industry, which harvests floating ice for processing into vodka, beer, and drinking water. Although commercial harvesting began only in the past decade, iceberg products

are rapidly evolving from a novelty to a commodity, and the business is gearing up for greater industrialization. Sipping iceberg beer at a hotel bar in St. John's the next evening, I chatted with Ron Stamp, the vice-president of sales and marketing at Iceberg Industries, a firm he co-founded in 1996. "We have," he told me with satisfaction, "gone beyond the pet-rock stage."

The possibility of towing icebergs to the Middle East and other arid regions around the world was studied and widely discussed during the 1970s. Nothing much came of the idea, for a number of reasons, chief among them being that it was stupid. (One report noted that it would take 128 days to tow an iceberg from Antarctica to the Middle East—twenty-four days longer than it would take for the iceberg to melt.)

Although towing icebergs proved impractical, harvesting ice at sea did not. The first commercial efforts, by the Canadian Iceberg Vodka Corporation, were modest. Fishing boats would edge alongside an iceberg, and workers wielding chain saws lubricated with vegetable oil would lop off a manageable section and hoist it aboard with large nets. A more ambitious harvesting technology was later developed by Iceberg Industries, the company responsible for the Twillingate caper. This involved a crane and an eight-claw grapple installed on a salvaged barge (originally used to transport molasses on the Great Lakes) equipped with heated storage tanks.

The harvesting of ice is tricky but not terribly sophisticated. During the season, which runs from April to late November, Iceberg Industries sends spotter planes in search of bergs that have drifted into coves, away from the swells of the open ocean. The barge then chugs in, secures itself to its prey, and begins chomping away. Each bite of the grapple picks up about half a ton of ice, which is fed into a crusher and conveyed into the tanks for melting. When the barge is filled to capacity (about 1,200 tons), it returns to the firm's tank farm, on Newfoundland's Avalon Peninsula, where the meltwater is stored for bottling, brewing, and making vodka.



"It's not rocket science," Stamp admits. "You hang on, chew it up, hope for the best, and get out of there before the damn thing rolls over."

Stamp says that his company has already completed much of the engineering for its next project—essentially a floating bottling plant. This operation will be centered on what Stamp calls a "mother ship," where the meltwater is to be filtered and bottled. A seventy-five-foot-long iceberg excavator will do the actual harvesting ("It's basically like coal mining," Stamp says), and ice fragments will be suctioned back to the mother ship by a sort of pneumatic tube. "We got the idea from central vacuuming," Stamp says.

The Canadian Iceberg Vodka Corporation is also gearing up for a major expansion. Before the end of the year the company hopes to start construction on a 240,000-square-foot drinking-water bottling plant near the tip of Newfoundland's Great Northern Peninsula, close to productive iceberg fields. "We've developed a conveyor-and-auger system, and we'll use mining techniques to carve into the side of the iceberg," Gary Pollack, the company's president, told me. "It's very similar to open-pit mining." Pollack envisions a fleet of

"maybe thirty ships" that will eventually prowl the seas in search of icebergs, making frequent trips back to the plant.

Talk of these projects inevitably raises the question, Why go to the considerable expense and hassle of capturing and melting icebergs? Why not, say, just back a tanker truck up to a garden hose?

The answer, not surprisingly, has to do with marketing. "A lot of people want pure water, and they'll pay the price," Pollack says. Proselytizers are quick to point out that the water in these icebergs fell on Greenland as snow 10,000 or more years ago and has been bound up in glaciers ever since, safely sequestered from modern contaminants. Pollack and Stamp claim that their product is purer than spring water (which is merely filtered naturally) and more natural than distilled water (which is mechanically processed). "It's great that a large inland city can clean its drinking water and strip out impurities," Stamp says. "But ten million people pee in it on a daily basis. And you know what? Nobody peed in mine. Isn't that worth an extra ten cents a bottle?"

"We're talking about a major, major pure product—it's the purest water on earth," Pollack says. Iceberg water is so

pure, he claims, that the vodka produced from it can be consumed in quantity with little or no risk of hangover. "I've seen people drink a whole bottle and not have any problem," he says. "Not that I'm recommending that to the general consumer."

Although no environmentalist opposition has arisen to the mining of icebergs, the impact on tourism has yet to be fully gauged. After Stockley and others made the press aware of the Twillingate iceberg grab, Iceberg Industries untethered itself from the local attraction and moved up the coast, where other icebergs awaited safely out of view of tourists. "Tourism has its place," Stamp admits, although he insists that his industry's expansion offers an entrepreneurial opportunity for the tourist trade: "People do factory tours all the time."

About a dozen tourists were aboard Stockley's boat the day I took the harbor tour. Most stood at the bow, some doing that annoying Kate Winslet splayed-arms thing from *Titanic*, others quietly scanning the horizon with binoculars, as if tracking a wily quarry. In time an iceberg was spotted in the distance, an event that triggered much excited gesturing.

I peered through my binoculars and saw it, a white apostrophe punctuating the hazy line between sky and sea. It looked uncommonly small—not only physically but metaphorically as well. What was once a terror of the sea, inciting awe in landscape painters of the nineteenth century, balefully stalking shipping lanes in the twentieth, now seemed captive and defeated—destined to end up in dreamy snapshots or decanted into plastic half-liter bottles. ▀

THE HORSES RUN BACK TO THEIR STALLS

It's another sorry tale about class in America, I'm sure
you're right,
but you have to imagine how proud we were.

Your grandfather painted a banner that hung from Wascher's
Pub
to Dianis's Grocery across the street: Reigh Count,

Kentucky Derby Winner, 1928.
And washtubs filled
with French champagne. I was far too young

to be up at the stables myself, of course, it took
me years
to understand they must have meant in *bottles*

in the washtubs, with ice.
His racing colors
were yellow and black, like the yellow

cabs, which is how Mr. Hertz first made the money
that built
the barns that bred the horses, bred at last this perfect

horse, our hundred and thirty seconds of flat-out earth-
borne bliss.
They bought the Arlington Racetrack then, and Jens

got a job that for once in his life allowed him to pay
the mortgage
and the doctors too, but he talked the loose way even

good men talk sometimes, and old man Hertz
was obliged
to let him go. It was August when the cab strike in

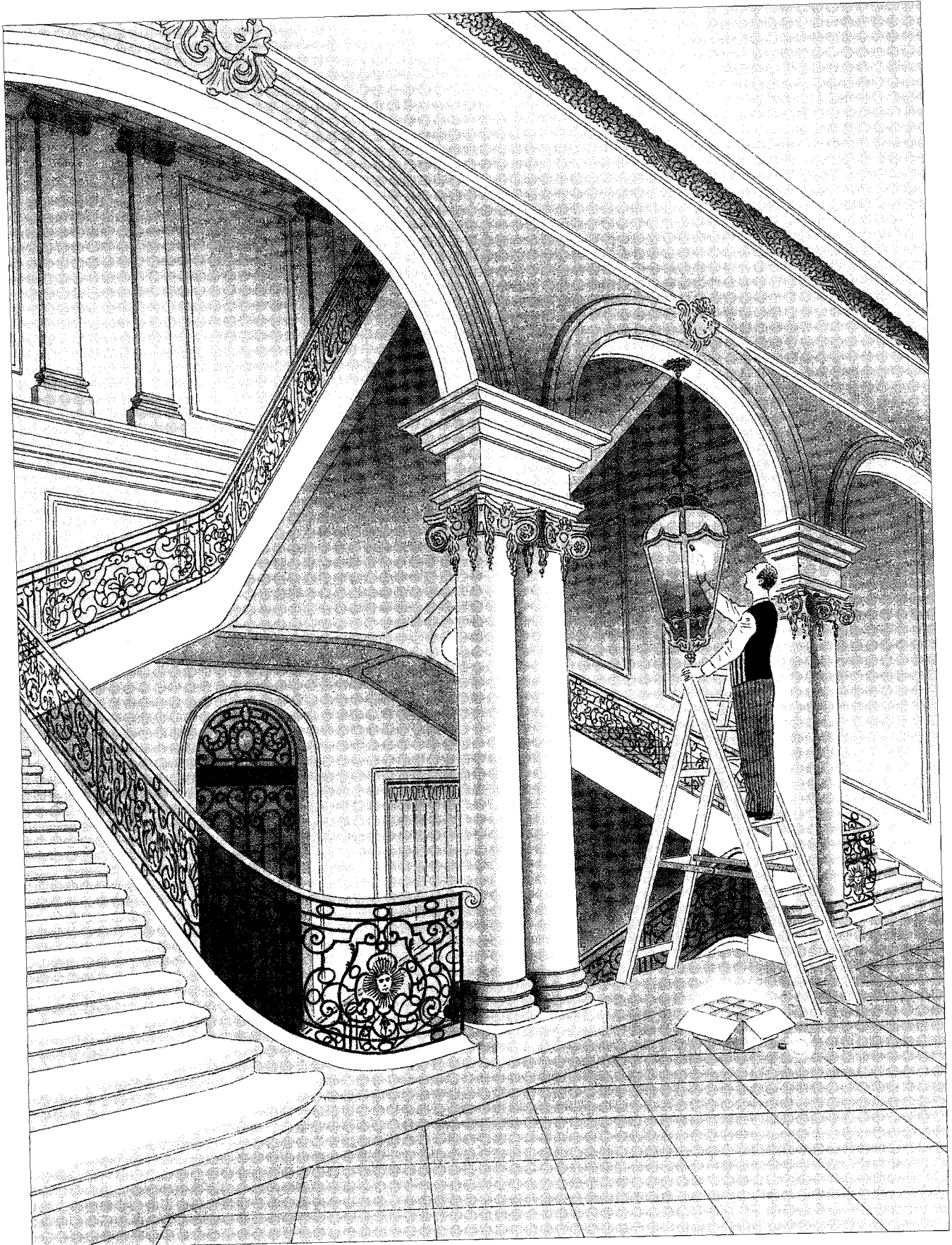
Chicago got so ugly. Somebody must have tipped
them off,
since we learned later on that the Count

and the trainer who slept in his stall had been moved
to another
barn. I'll never forget the morning after: ash

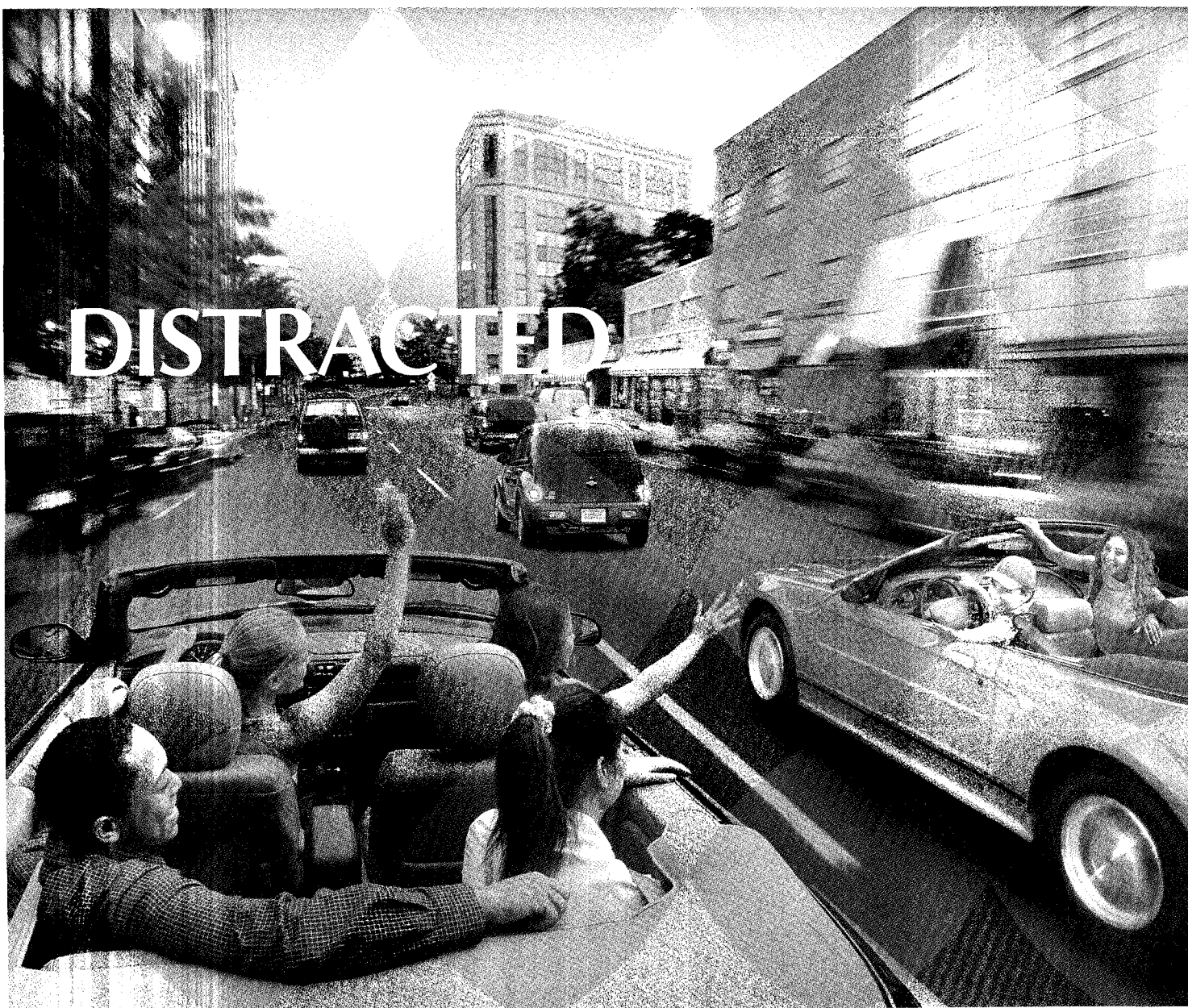
in the air all the way to town, and the smell of those
poor animals,
who'd never harmed a soul. There's a nursery

rhyme that goes like that, isn't there? Never
did us any
harm. I think it's about tormenting a cat.

—LINDA GREGERSON



WEALTH by Guy Billout



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GOD'S GOODNESS

A short story

BY MARJORIE KEMPER

.....

First, last, and foremost, Ling Tan thought of herself as a Christian. So when Mrs. Sheriday said, "Tell me a little something about yourself," Ling didn't even draw breath before responding, "I am good Christian." And so saying, she sat up even straighter in her chair, like a star pupil providing the correct answer to a teacher.

But the employment counselor didn't smile. She didn't even look up. She went on regarding the papers on her desk and said, "Well, yes, I'm sure that you are. But what I meant was, tell me more about your work experience. I see that you were enrolled in a practical-nursing program at Long Beach Memorial Hospital but you didn't complete the course of study."

Ling ducked her head.

"Why was that?"

Ling said nothing.

"Why, exactly, did you drop out?"

Ling smiled and shrugged.

The other woman waited.

The silence got too big for Ling. Twisting her hands, she said, "Had late classes. Afraid to ride bus home at night."

"I see." Mrs. Sheriday looked back down at the papers. "Next time try taking morning classes, because you need more credits." She pointed her pen at Ling's thin résumé. "Your references are very good; I can see you're good with patients. But our doctors and care managers like to see more academic training. You still have time to register for some classes at Long Beach Community College."

Ling nodded.

"Even if you were just enrolled, I could list them."

"Next semester I enroll," Ling said, and smiled. Americans liked smiling, and Californians smiled all the time, so Ling made it a habit to smile constantly. She smiled when she was alone; she might even have smiled in her sleep.

As Ling got up to leave, Mrs. Sheriday said, "Check with me midweek—I might have something then. I see you've worked with children. I have a pediatric oncologist who is looking for somebody to live in and provide custodial care for a patient who is terminal. You wouldn't have any expenses, and you could save your wages for next school term."

Ling nodded, and in acknowledgment of the seriousness of this new topic, the mortal illness of a child, attempted to stop smiling. But this was not quite possible.

Back in her furnished room, two hours later, Ling drank three glasses of water. She drank the first one because she was thirsty from sitting on the bus-stop bench in the hot sun for an hour; she drank the second and third to trick her stomach into thinking she had fed it breakfast and lunch. She sat in a chair she had placed at the uncurtained window of her second-story room. It was spring, and in a yard beyond a shabby garage two plum trees—unpruned for a generation—were struggling into bloom. Ling let her eyes rest on the white blossoms and took the time to thank God for the beauty he had created in every moment and in every place. Even now, even here. Wherever she looked she could see evidence of his goodness. And the flowering plums were beautiful—if Ling looked only at their canopies, if her eye didn't follow the scaling trunks down to the array of old paint cans and junk lumber nestled in the weeds beneath.

Ling took a deep breath and thanked God for his unceasing goodness to her—air in abundance, strong lungs to take it in, the flowering plums, even the water in her plastic glass. Ling sat in her chair and watched the plum trees until dusk fell and the blossoms melted into the darkness. Then, having no food and no money to buy it, she went to bed. In her neighborhood children played late; car alarms went on and off, seemingly at random; police cars and ambulances wailed on their way to St. Mary's Hospital, a block away. Even after she'd pulled the shades down, the orange streetlights cast a hellish glow on the ceiling. Ling shut her eyes and prayed. She was deep in a prayer of thanksgiving for her many blessings when she fell asleep.

Ling called Mrs. Sheriday on Wednesday from a pay phone on the corner of her street. "Ling, I'm glad you called. I got a call from the doctor about that boy. I made a tentative appointment for you to go out and meet his mother, Mrs. Tipton. The parents are divorced."

Ling smiled furiously into the phone.

Martha Tipton, the sick boy's mother, opened the door to Ling Tan. While still in the vestibule, Mrs. Tipton said, "Oh, dear, you don't look very strong—you're shorter than Mike."

"Oh, very strong," Ling said. "Not big, not tall, but very strong. Used to working with children."

"Mike's sixteen. He doesn't weigh what he should, of course, but he's tall for his age."

Ling smiled. "Very strong," she repeated.

Mrs. Tipton led the way into the living room. "Well, if you say so. Mrs. Sheriday said you'd be bringing references. May I see them?"

Ling opened her purse and proffered the letters, and Mrs. Tipton sat down on the edge of the sofa to read them. Ling remained standing. The living room was sparsely furnished—a sofa, a piano, a bare coffee table. All of Mrs. Tipton's domestic efforts appeared to have gone into her yard and her plants. From the sidewalk Ling had already noticed, with approval, Mrs. Tipton's well-kept garden. Now Ling's eyes went to a row of African violets on a low window-sill—pink ones, white ones, purple ones—all blooming! Mrs. Tipton was a good steward.

"These are remarkable," Mrs. Tipton said, handing the letters back to Ling. "Let's go back to Mike's room and see if he's awake." When they got there, Mrs. Tipton stuck her head inside. "He's sleeping," she whispered, closing the door quietly.

"Will I sleep close by, so can hear boy if he call?" Ling asked.

Mrs. Tipton nodded and opened the next door—into a small room containing a bureau, a sewing machine, an ironing board, and a single bed. "I've cleared out the bureau for your things," she said.

The room had French doors. Outside, healthy ferns and fuchsias cascaded from hanging baskets, and nasturtiums bordered the brick walk. God's goodness, as well as Mrs. Tipton's fine stewardship, was much in evidence.

Ling transported her belongings—a green leatherette suitcase and a canvas satchel holding her Bible and her Bible-study books—on the bus later that afternoon. When she arrived, at six, Mike was asleep again, and Mrs. Tipton was preparing to leave for an appointment with her tax man.

"Mike's had his dinner," she said. "He usually eats at five-thirty. Just go in and introduce yourself when he wakes up. And when you do, give him the pills in this paper cup. I've told him about you, and he's expecting to meet you. If you should need me, the number is on the refrigerator, beside Doctor Mackenzie's."

After Mrs. Tipton had gone, Ling checked on Mike. She stood in the doorway to his room and studied her new charge for a long time. He was blond, pale, and tall, as his mother had said—or, more accurate in the circumstances,



long. His bare arms were covered with a light blond down. Ling—who had been orphaned at eight and had survived typhus and thirty-two days in an open boat—could not accept the inevitability of the sleeping boy's death. Inevitability was a concept that ran contrary to her experience. That afternoon, while discussing Mike's illness with Mrs. Tipton, Ling had said that she would pray for a miracle for Mike. Mrs. Tipton's brow had furrowed, and she'd said that it was a little late in the day for that. Ling had quickly dropped the subject, but she could not drop the hope. To Ling, who regarded her own life as an unfolding miracle, miracles were a commonplace.

Later, when Ling heard Mike's dry little cough floating down the hall, she ran to his doorway and spoke quietly. "Mike, I Ling Tan. I here to help Mother take care of you until you get better." She smiled at the boy—who pushed himself higher on his pillows and studied her face. Ling went on, "Mother just go to see tax man. Back very soon."

"I don't know where you got your information, Ling Tan," Mike said severely, "but I'm not getting better. I'm in the process of getting worse."

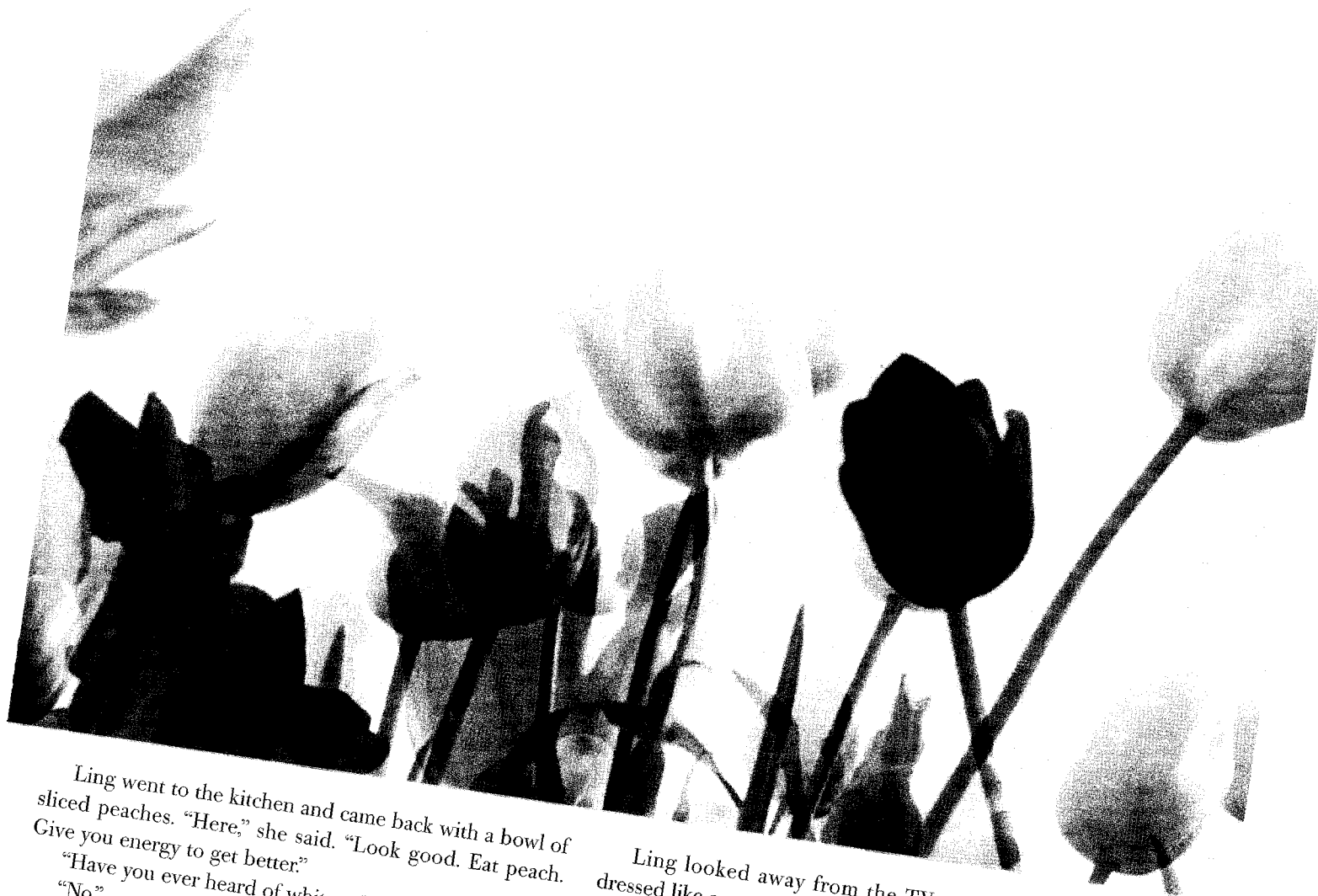
"Naughty boy!" Ling exclaimed, laughing as she rushed forward into the room to tuck in a loose cover at the foot of his bed. "Now Ling here, you stop getting worse. Start getting better!"

"You could maybe benefit from a little chat with my oncologist," Mike said, taking a pillow from behind his back and pounding it into a new shape.

"I tell him thing or two. You hungry?"

"No."

"Mother make you little snack. Leave in refrigerator."



Ling went to the kitchen and came back with a bowl of sliced peaches. "Here," she said. "Look good. Eat peach. Give you energy to get better."

"Have you ever heard of white cells?"

"No."

"Lucky you."

Ling nodded. "Lucky all my life—but not luck really. *Grace*." She sat down at the foot of Mike's bed. "Grace better than luck. You pray for grace, Mike. Not look nice to pray for luck."

Mike ate a peach slice. "I'll remember that," he said, and he picked up the TV remote from his bedside table. As the TV sprang to life, a sitcom audience screamed with laughter; Mike muted the TV. "I'd like to know what's so damn funny," he said.

Ling said, "Nothing that funny, don't think. I read in magazine, studio bring crazy people to TV shows in buses, to laugh like pack of monkeys."

"Hyenas," Mike corrected. "The expression is 'pack of hyenas.'"

Ling nodded. "Hyenas," she repeated. "Bring them from crazy house."

"That explains a lot," Mike said. He flipped through the channels until he found a rerun of *M*A*S*H*.

"Oh, like this program," Ling said enthusiastically.

"Good doctors on this program. Funny."

"Not very realistic, though," Mike said. "I've yet to meet a doctor with even a rudimentary sense of humor."

Ling nodded brightly.

"Aren't you supposed to bring me my meds?"

Ling looked away from the TV, where Klinger was dressed like a woman. "Oh, I forget! I get them right now." She handed Mike a glass of water and watched while he transferred six pills from the paper cup to his mouth and swallowed them. She said, "So many!"

"Yes, and they accomplish so little."

"But good for you—make you better."

Mike turned the TV back up. Ling returned to the foot of his bed. She sat sideways and turned her head to watch. "Klinger wear same dress as my auntie," she told Mike, and giggled.

Mike snorted. "I hope it looked better on her."

"Didn't," Ling said with a laugh. "Auntie not look good, but Auntie good inside." Ling tapped her breast. "Here."

She gazed around Mike's room. It had a wall of bookshelves, and a desk and chair by the window. A picture of Mike's parents sat on the bureau, taken when they were much younger. They were holding hands. Ling turned away; photos made her nervous. They were always of things that were over with, gone—a moment, a smile, a person, sometimes a whole country. A poster of an old man with scraggly hair was on the back of Mike's door. The man was sticking his tongue out. Why did Mike have a picture of a crazy person on his door? "Who is that?" she asked cautiously, in case it was a relative.

"Einstein."

Ling smiled and nodded.

"He was a physicist," Mike said. "A genius," he added for Ling's benefit, because she still looked blank. "You've heard of E equals MC squared?"

Ling smiled and nodded. "Are you genius too? Have so many books?"

"I'm smart, but possibly not a genius."

"How come he make that face?"

"Why not?"

"I try go to college, learn more, but my English not very good," Ling confided. "I quit before bad grades get on permanent record." She had never told this to anyone before.

"Your English isn't so bad," Mike said. "Considering."

"Maybe you help me—tell me when I using wrong word."

"It would have to be a crash course. My mother must have told you I'm on my way out. We're talking months here, Ling Tan." Mike ran through the channels with the remote. "Two, maybe three." He clicked the set off. "Tops."

"Mother can't know everything. Doctors either. I wait and see."

"An empiricist in our midst," Mike said.

"A what?"

"An empiricist is someone who draws conclusions from the evidence."

"Not Empiricist—Christian. Believe in God's goodness. In miracles."

"That's what it would take."

RIVERMIST: FOR ROLAND FLINT

*When the kennel where my ridgeback died
some thirty years ago
wrote to ask for my business again,
offering us one free night's board
for every three nights paid, I looked
at that name on the envelope, Rivermist,
imagining they were writing to say
that Mowgli was somehow alive,
the swordlike blade of fur still bristling
on his back; that he had waited
all these years for me to pick him up.
And though I've had four dogs since,
a small one at my feet right now, each
running too swiftly through his life and mine,
I could have wept, thinking of rivers and mists—
how in their wavering shadows
they had prefigured and concealed
the losses to come: mother and uncles, friends,
and Roland now, so newly dead, who
on the flyleaf of an early book once wrote,
in his careful, redemptive hand: with love
for Linda and Ira, and for Mowgli.*

—LINDA PASTAN

Ling nodded smartly. "Already praying. Start without you. You see. God is good. He bless us every day."

"You could have fooled me," Mike said.

Ling quickly fit herself into the routine of the Tipton household. Fitting in was what she did best; it was her special gift. She could be quiet, as she had been when her family had hidden from the soldiers in the forest. She could make herself small, as she had in the boat. If necessary, she could even push herself forward and talk fast and loud, as she had in the refugee camp. With Mike she was cheerful as a rule. Early on they developed a vaudeville routine of sorts, with Mike playing Baby Curmudgeon to her Cheerful Naif.

With Mrs. Tipton, Ling was careful to be quiet and pleasant. Mrs. Tipton's nerves were ragged, and she frequently burst into tears in the course of ordinary conversations. Not wanting Mike to see her cry, she spent a lot of time outside, working in her garden. She came into her son's room at frequent intervals, but rarely stayed long. Usually she rushed off, saying she needed to check on something—just seconds before bursting into tears.

When Mr. Tipton came over, Ling endeavored to make herself invisible. Though she suspected that Mr. Tipton was every bit as sad as his ex-wife, he seemed more angry than sad. He seemed to be angry all the time, at everything and everyone except Mike.

When Ling first met him, she recognized him right away from the photo in his son's room. Unlike poor Mrs. Tipton, Mr. Tipton looked the same as in Mike's photo. When Ling opened the door to him, she said, "Oh! Mike's father! He will be so happy to see you."

"Where's Martha?"

"Go to market. Back soon. I'm Ling Tan."

When she heard Mrs. Tipton's car in the driveway, Ling went out to help carry the groceries. "Mr. Tipton here with Mike," she said. Ling put away the groceries while Mrs. Tipton went back to Mike's room.

Shortly thereafter Mr. Tipton came out to the kitchen. He looked very angry. "Mike tells me you're praying for him."

Ling felt herself accused, and ducked her head. "Yes," she admitted.

"Well, naturally you're free to pray day and night, but I'd appreciate your not talking to Mike about it. Or about miracles. We've spent two years choking on hope around here; hope is ancient history. I appreciate your intentions, but the last thing we need is a latecomer peddling miracles."

Mr. Tipton had spoken quickly and softly, and though Ling had certainly gotten the sense of what he'd said, she'd missed some of the words. What, for instance, did "peddling" mean? Looking down at the floor, she said, "Just try to keep up boy's spirits."

Every morning, when she brought in Mike's breakfast and pills, she opened his drapes and delivered her line:

"Look, Mikey! God make another beautiful day just for you. He expect you to *look* at it."

His line was "Close the damn drapes. It's too bright."

"Too bright for moles, maybe," Ling always responded. "You not mole. You boy."

One morning when Ling opened the drapes she saw Mike's mother kneeling in the garden. "Look, Mikey, Mother planting new flowers for you to see out window. Wave at her." Mike rolled his eyes, but he waved. His mother was kneeling in the dirt, transferring pansies from flats into a flower bed around the deodar tree in the side yard. Surprised, she smiled and waved back.

"Your mother best gardener I know," Ling observed. "She love her plants. They feel it and grow big for her."

"She loves me, too, but this is as big as I'm getting."

"You plenty big already," Ling said. "Bigger than me."

"What *is* this?" Mike asked when Ling lifted the lid from a bowl on his breakfast tray.

"Oatmeal."

"I don't like oatmeal."

"Oatmeal good for you. You eat, then maybe I bring something you like."

"Whose bright idea is this?"

"My idea. I read in magazine when we at Doctor Mackenzie's office, oatmeal cleanse the blood."

"Jesus, Ling, get a clue."

"Won't hurt you to eat little bowl of oatmeal," Ling said.

Because Mrs. Tipton took pills and slept soundly, one of Ling's jobs was to listen for Mike during the night. If he needed her, he knocked on their shared wall. After helping him to the bathroom, or getting him something to drink or a pill or—on a bad night—a shot, or rubbing his foot when he had a cramp, Ling kept him company until he was able to sleep again. One night, curled up like a cat at the foot of Mike's bed, Ling asked, "You want to watch TV? Maybe *M*A*S*H* on." It usually was.

"Not really. Has my dad bawled you out about this miracle deal?"

"Not know 'bawled out.'"

"Did he yell at you?"

"Not yell," Ling said. "Father worried for you. Not want me upset you."

"I was afraid of that. I want you to know I didn't complain about you. I only mentioned it to him because I thought he'd get a kick out of it. I was a little off the mark there. Shows you how well I know dear old Dad. Anyway, I hope he didn't hurt your feelings."

"Not hurt my feelings. Don't need Father's permission to pray. Don't need permission for miracle either."

"I wouldn't think so."

"Father love you very much. Tell me getting special doctor for you." Mr. Tipton had informed Ling and Mrs. Tipton that he'd arranged for a psychiatrist who worked

with terminally ill children and adolescents to visit Mike.

"You mean the shrink?"

Ling smiled and shook her head to indicate that she didn't know the word.

"S-H-R-I-N-K—that's another word for a head doctor. One of the high priests of humanism."

"Ah," Ling said. "Father's priest?"

Mike snorted. "Close enough. He's supposed to make me feel better about dying."

"He can do that?"

"We shall see." Mike closed his eyes.

"You want me read to you?"

"Sure."

"Same book Father read this afternoon?" Father and son were reading Hegel. Ling had no idea what it was about; all she knew was that it had more hard words than the Bible and no story at all.

"Not this time of night. You pick something."

Ling ran to her room and came back with her Bible. "I read to you from *my* book." Laughing, she held it up for Mike to see.

"Oh, Dad would love this!"

"He say not talk about miracle. Didn't say about *Bible*."

"True," Mike said. "I know—read the Book of Job. Let's get a standard of comparison."

"Oh, Job *sad* story."

"My favorite kind."

But about fifteen minutes into Job's travails Mike's pain pill took effect, and he fell asleep. Ling stopped reading. She sat very still until she was certain that the boy was sleeping soundly, and then she moved to the desk chair. Ling tried to go on reading (she'd left off where Job said, "Wearisome nights are appointed to me"), but the light from the little bedside lamp was too distant to read by, so she shut the book and put her head down on the desk. The miracle she'd been praying for since arriving at the Tiptons' was nowhere in sight, and even Ling, always optimistic, always on the lookout for a blessing, understood that they were running low on time. Mike kept getting thinner, despite the nice meals his mother prepared, meals that Ling spent hours coaxing the boy to eat. Fortunately, she'd been telling Mrs. Tipton the truth when she'd said that she was strong, because nowadays she more carried than walked Mike to the bathroom. They had stopped going downtown to the medical building to see his oncologist. Now Dr. Mackenzie came to the house, rushing in and staying only long enough to rationalize his big bill and to cast a pall over everyone's spirits. Mike's cough had grown worse. At last count nine pills were in the paper cup after dinner, and, most ominous, syringes of pain medicine were now kept in the refrigerator for the relief of Mike's severe headaches, which came on without warning. All in all, Ling had a lot to pray for and about; her head cradled in her thin arms, she was still praying when the sun came up.

The new doctor, Dr. Hanson, the shrink, came to the house three afternoons a week. On his first visit, every time Mike had said anything, Dr. Hanson had responded, "How does that make you feel, Mike?"

"Like death warmed over," Mike had said, trying to fluster him. Or "Makes me want to die," or "Scares me to death." Ling and Mike had exchanged conspiratorial glances, and Ling had laughed behind her hand.

But Dr. Hanson proved to be such a nice young man that teasing him wasn't much fun. In fact, after he'd been coming for a couple of weeks, Mike told Ling that he felt sorry for Dr. Hanson.

"Why sorry for him?" she snapped. "You the sick one."

"Yeah, but he's so damn hopeful, you know?"

"Bible say hope a virtue. Have to hope."

"For what?"

Ling shrugged. "Just hope." She had begun to resent this particular injunction.

"You're saying that this mandatory hope has no object?"

Ling thought for a minute and said, "Hope is to prop open door, so good things can come in. Maybe when you not looking."

"I see. Hope as a metaphysical doorstep. Good one, Ling. Well, anyway, at least Doctor Hanson *talks*. Doctor Mackenzie hasn't said two personal words to me in weeks."

"He lose interest in us, I think."

"I know. I shouldn't have played so hard to get. And probably I should have eaten more *oatmeal*. It's abundantly clear that I've no one to blame for all this but myself."

Ling looked at the floor. She'd thrown the box of oatmeal in the garbage a week before. "Maybe should invite some boys, Mikey, come talk to you. You have some nice friends own age?"

"Not really. Do you?"

"Not really," Ling admitted. "We each other's friend now, I think."

"Works for me."

As Mike grew worse, the room filled with sickroom apparatus—first a walker, then a commode, and finally, after a series of consecutive bad nights, a rollaway bed for Ling. While Mike slept, Ling went through the Book of Job, which had become a favorite of Mike's, with a fine-tooth comb, hoping to find some consolation. After God had let the Devil have his way with Job, after Job had brought credit on him, God took him back. The Bible even said that afterward God gave Job new sons and daughters, new cattle and sheep. And, Ling supposed, cattle were cattle, and one cow was as good as another, but children were not cattle. Children had souls. You could not replace one with another. So where was the comfort in all this?

But Mike read Job over and over. He memorized great hunks of it, and insisted on reading his favorite bits aloud to Ling. Sometimes he stopped mid-sentence and laughed.

"I'm in your debt for suggesting this, Ling."

"No problem," Ling said. "God's word count for something in this world, but I not go to college, and not a genius, so I not always sure what."

"Yes you are," Mike said.

Ling shook her head.

"You believe in God's goodness still, don't you?"

Ling turned her back on Mike and looked out the window.

"You do, don't you, Ling?"

"Have to believe in that when I look at God's big world," Ling said.

"There you go," Mike said. "The world is very, very big. It stands to reason that it's beyond our understanding, yes?"

"Yes," Ling whispered. "But used to understand."

"And now you don't. You see, you've learned something already."

"What I am learning?"

"That there's more to heaven and earth than oatmeal and a positive attitude. More than Ling Tan was born knowing. Humility—not to put too fine a point on it."

Humility was a hard lesson, worse than English grammar, and Ling missed her old, blithe assurance as keenly as she might have missed a beloved pet. But she believed what she had told Mikey about hope—that you could use it to prop open a door so that something good might come in. So she hoped. And waited. And prayed for something good to slip through their open door. Maybe at night, while they slept.

Dr. Hanson was an even bigger smiler than Ling—who these days had to remind herself to smile, and who thought that the young doctor overdid it.

"Doctor Hanson always so cheerful," Ling remarked one day, while she folded laundry on Mike's bed. She didn't mean it as a compliment.

"And why not?" Mike asked. "He's not the one who's dying. Though I don't know why he doesn't get right on it, since he sees it as such a gigantic opportunity for what he calls 'personal growth.'"

Ling giggled. "I think he already grow big *enough*." The doctor was a little on the plump side.

Mike laughed. "When he was here yesterday, I quoted some Job at him—'Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me.' I wanted his take on that."

"What did he say?"

"He said, 'Beautiful, beautiful!' With this huge, ecstatic smile plastered on that big round face of his."

"How did that make you feel?" Ling said, joking.

"Like I'd been dead three days," Mike shot back.

"Maybe Job beautiful if not about *you*," Ling said, smoothing a pillowcase. She almost wished she hadn't

The Harold W. McGraw, Jr. Prize in Education



Freeman A. Hrabowski, III



Mary Catherine Swanson



Carl A. Cohn

Honoring three educators whose lessons reach us all

Once a year, we honor educators whose innovations and efforts have raised the standards of the field of education and greatly improved the prospects of the students in their charge. This year's panel of judges selected a trio of honorees whose careers have been dedicated to eliminating education's achievement gap.

As part of The McGraw-Hill Companies' support for education, The Harold W. McGraw, Jr. Prize in Education was established in 1988 to mark the corporation's 100th anniversary and to honor its Chairman Emeritus for his lifelong commitment to education. The award salutes those who have had a meaningful impact on others.

Each of this year's honorees has found ways to improve education for students who have been traditionally overlooked. Through their unique programs, high expectations, incessant support and plain old hard work, their students have been exceeding people's expectations for years.

We are honored to salute them.

DR. FREEMAN A. HRABOWSKI, III As an educator, administrator, researcher, and civil rights advocate, Dr. Freeman A. Hrabowski, III has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to educational excellence and minority achievement, particularly in math and science. Dr. Hrabowski became president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) in 1992 and has rigorously promoted excellence in undergraduate teaching, research, and graduate education.

Through Dr. Hrabowski's *Meyerhoff Scholars Program*, UMBC has become an elite school for aspiring African-American scientists, engineers, and mathematicians. As a result of the program, which each year awards scholarships to 50 high school graduates who have shown promise in math or science, UMBC is among the nation's leaders in the numbers of undergraduate degrees awarded to African-American students in the life sciences and computer and information science. Nearly all Meyerhoff students have gone on to graduate or medical school.

MARY CATHERINE SWANSON As founder of the secondary school program AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), Mary Catherine Swanson has touched the lives of thousands of students around the world, especially low-income and underserved students.

A former high school English teacher, Swanson created the AVID program in 1980 to help prepare underachieving students for four-year college entry. Through rigorous curriculum, study skills, tutoring support, study groups and role models, AVID classes provide underserved middle and high school students with the academic and motivational support to succeed. A program that began with 32 students in one high school is now implemented in over 1,200 schools in 21 states and 14 foreign countries. More than 92 percent of AVID students enroll in college, a figure nearly one-third higher than national averages.

DR. CARL A. COHN As America's longest serving urban superintendent, Dr. Carl A. Cohn has made the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) a model for high academic standards and accountability. In Long Beach, with the most diverse population of any large city in America, Dr. Cohn has focused his efforts on transforming the district into a place where high expectations are set and students and teachers are given the resources to succeed.

Dr. Cohn's district-wide accomplishments in the Long Beach public schools include record attendance, the lowest rate of student suspensions in a decade, a decrease in both the student failure and dropout rates, an end to social promotion, an increase in the number of students taking college preparatory courses, higher student achievement and significantly safer schools. His efforts have inspired leaders across the country to pursue meaningful school reform.

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introduced Mikey to the Bible. She'd certainly had it with Job and his comforters—even Job's God, whom she'd just barely contrived to keep separate from her own. These days, when she had the time and the energy to read, she stuck strictly to the Psalms and the Gospels. But Mike liked Job almost as much as he liked Einstein. Certainly more than Mr. Tipton at this point in the proceedings liked Hegel. Mike had told his mother that Job was his favorite book—which caused Mrs. Tipton to run out of the room in tears, and which she wisely did not pass on to her ex-husband. When Ling brought in Mike's breakfast, he always quoted, in a rising falsetto, "Or is there *any* taste in the white of an egg?"

Folding towels, Ling said, "I think Doctor Hanson look better if he grow beard. Then his face not seem so wide."

"I'll tell him."

"No, Mikey! Then he know we notice his face fat." Piling the folded laundry back in the basket, Ling confessed, "Mikey, worried about miracle. Afraid prayers aren't getting through."

"Sure they are," Mike said. "It's the answers that seem to be snagged up."

"Same thing," Ling said.

"Not necessarily."

Ling nodded. "Study guide say God answer prayers, but his answer not always one we want. No, I say it wrong: it say, maybe not answer we *expect*."

"Ah, the element of surprise. One of his favorite devices. As we've learned."

Ling took a deep breath and tried to smile at Mike's little joke. "Not giving up, Mikey. I keep praying. Promise."

"Everyone should have a hobby," Mike said, "to quote the estimable Doctor Hanson." He flipped on the TV.

Dr. Hanson had asked Mike what his hobbies were, and Mike had said that just lately his hobby was dying.

Undeterred, Dr. Hanson had said, "That's more of a full-time job, isn't it? I'm talking recreation. Do you play chess?"

After that Dr. Hanson and Mike played chess. Mike consistently beat him. But instead of saying "Checkmate," Mike would say, "How does that make you feel?"

"Beat," Dr. Hanson would reply. "Walloped."

"You don't think he's letting me win, do you?" Mike asked Ling later that week. He was having one of what he and Ling were calling his "bad days." He'd had a solid week of them. The smell of Dr. Hanson's after-shave still lingered in the room. Even his after-shave, Ling had protested to Mike, was cheerful.

"Doctor Hanson can't beat genius, Mikey."

"I may not be a genius, Ling. It's impossible at this point to tell for sure."

"Close. Maybe not like old Uncle." Ling pointed at the Einstein poster. "But you not old like him either. Smarter

than Doctor Hanson for sure! What he thinking? *Smiling* every minute at boy supposed to be dying!"

"You should talk."

"I know. Used to smile like hyena."

"Monkey! No, monkeys *grin*, don't they? Hyenas laugh. *Lings* smile."

"Ling not so much smiling now. Only when something to smile about. You notice?"

"Actually, I've been meaning to talk to you about that. I think it's time to paste a big old smile on your face and leave it there, because we're definitely running out of reasons. Anyway, on you a smile has always looked good."

Ling smiled. It was an effort.

A month later Dr. Hanson stopped smiling. Mike was in a coma. Still Dr. Hanson came at his appointed times and sat beside Mike's bed and held the boy's hand—now studded like a clove orange with IVs. Dr. Mackenzie came every day, and a registered nurse came morning and evening. Mr. and Mrs. Tipton took turns sitting in Mike's room—Mrs. Tipton crying freely now, her hands clasped in her lap; Mr. Tipton staring at an open book, the pages of which he rarely turned. Ling sat out of the way, in Mike's desk chair, which she had pulled over to the window so that she could look out at Mrs. Tipton's garden.

On the night before he'd slipped into the coma, Ling and Mike had tried to watch *M*A*S*H*, but Mike had a terrible headache, and the light from the TV hurt his eyes. Ling had turned it off.

"We see that one already," she said briskly. By then they'd seen them all. "That one sad anyway. Even Hawkeye cry." Mike, eyes shut, nodded. Ling gave him his pain shot and rubbed his temples with a Chinese herbal lotion that her auntie had used for migraines.

"My God, what is this stuff?" Mike protested. "It smells like a bog!"

"All natural," Ling assured him. "Very good for headache. Cleanse the blood. Good for bad nerves."

"I can't *believe* you're still trying to cleanse this treacherous blood of mine! However," Mike conceded, "my nerves could not be worse."

"Auntie swear by it," Ling said. She smoothed his thin hair back, rubbing his forehead.

Mike looked up into her eyes. "You know where we made our mistake, don't you?"

Ling shook her head.

"Praying for grace instead of luck. We tipped our hand. We indicated we were willing to *settle*."

Ling bit her lower lip and didn't answer.

"Come on, Ling. How does that make you feel?"

Ling giggled weakly. "Don't," she said. "Too tired to joke."

It was three in the morning. The only noise in the house was the refrigerator humming in the kitchen. Mike closed his eyes and quoted: "God thundereth marvelously

with his voice; great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend."

"That not God, that the refrigerator?"

"Maybe, maybe not. You'll admit that the universe, or God—whatever you like to call it—*does* stuff we don't get. Hegel didn't get it. I'm not even sure Einstein got it."

"He get it. That's why he stick tongue out."

Mike snorted.

Ling took a long breath. She put the cap back on the bottle of Auntie's lotion and said, "Maybe God blessing us this moment, and we not knowing it."

"Thanks for trying, Ling, but that may be the single most depressing thing you've said to me."

"Not depressing, Mikey. I only mean he bless me with you and he bless you with me."

The morning after Mike died, after she'd packed and before she left Mrs. Tipton's house forever, Ling went into Mike's room. She had made up the empty bed the night before. Now she went to the window and pulled back the drapes.

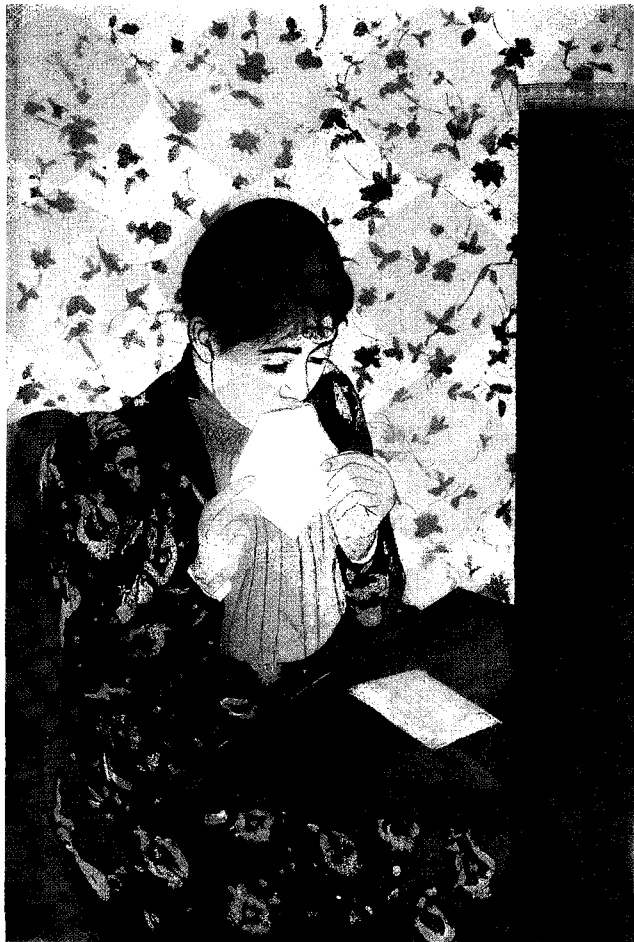
"God make another beautiful day, Mikey," she said. Then, after blowing her nose and replacing the ragged

Kleenex in the pocket of her sweater, she added, "But this one not for you."

Ling stood staring out Mike's window. The dew was still on the grass; though Mrs. Tipton lay sedated in her bed, her lawn shone brightly in the morning light. The little faces of her pansies were turned up to the sun. The beauty of the flowers, and the sunshine they sought, were, Ling still believed, firm and undeniable evidence of God's goodness. Even here and even now. But this knowledge no longer lifted her up. She placed the palm of her hand on Mikey's empty bed and briefly bowed her head.

When she turned to go, her gaze met Einstein's. She had noticed a month before that except for the rude face he was making, Mikey's old scientist looked a lot like the illustrations of God the Father in her Bible-study guide. She had shown Mikey, who had thought this a hilarious coincidence. Now, her hand on the doorknob, Ling looked into the old face that had looked down on them for months, silently regarding everything they had done and suffered.

"Good-bye, Mr. Genius," she said softly. Then, before she slipped out the door, and in recognition, or solidarity, or maybe just farewell, Ling stuck out her little pink tongue. ▀



PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART: THE LOUIS E. STERN COLLECTION

MARY CASSATT: *THE LETTER* (1890–1891)

All day it is with her like a song
even as she slices a breakfast orange,
brushes her hair,
shuts a window.
She is listening to it
when company calls
and she talks about yesterday's news,
pours tea,
says good-bye at the door.
Then, alone with it finally
in late afternoon,
she puts it on the desk,
arranges it
as though she were putting flowers in a vase.
Then she slips it into the envelope,
seals it with her tongue.

—JOAN I. SIEGEL



TRAVEL

AN IRELAND OF LEGEND

Following in the mythic footsteps of Queen Maeve

BY JACKI LYDEN

.....

She was impetuous, brave, and determined to have her way. He was an iconoclast, a misanthrope, and a force of nature. He had killed hundreds of men, but she challenged him anyway. She was Maeve, the Queen of Connacht. He was Cúchulainn, the Hound of Ulster. Together they are the stars of the myth-epic *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, whose title translates as *The Cattle Raid of Cooley*. Although the *Táin* is often referred to as Ireland's *Aeneid*, Virgil's prose is tame by comparison with that of the anonymous twelfth-century Christian monks who set down on vellum the tales that, some evidence suggests, bards had told since the late Iron Age, around 300 B.C.

As a once and future war correspondent and as a female, I have always ad-

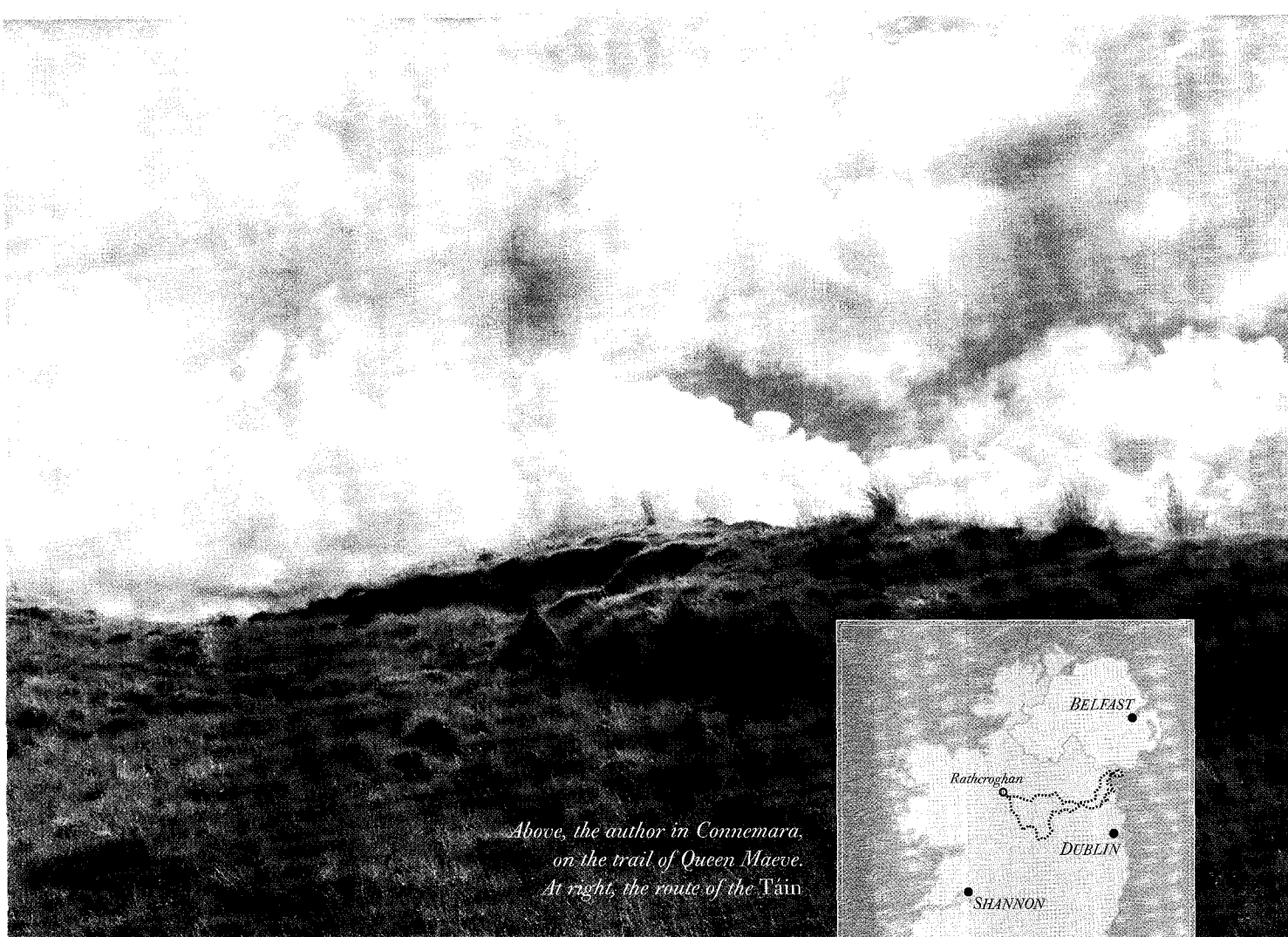
mired warrior queens. And nearly every year of my life I have gone to Ireland, the country of my ancestors. My most recent journey there was made in pursuit of Maeve. She is a myth, for no one has been able to prove that she truly lived. And yet the story follows a real trail, amid real ring forts, villages, rivers, and mountains. The route of the military campaign described in the *Táin* can today be traced by car. It runs for 365 miles, from the plains of Ireland's western midlands to the eastern borderlands with Ulster. Travelers who like to stray from the beaten track will be glad to know that hardly anyone except scholars and Maeve mavens makes a *Táin* pilgrimage today. The route is nonetheless replete with all sorts of sensual

pleasures and evocative historical sites.

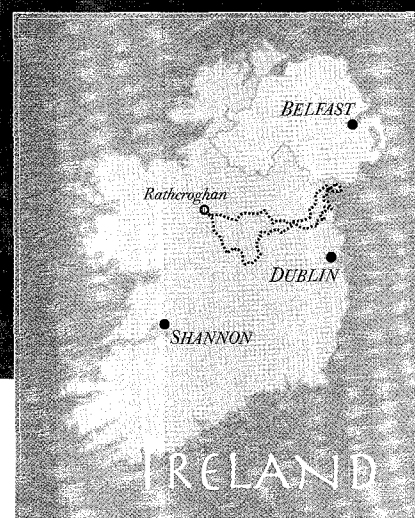
As I prepared to follow in Maeve's footsteps, last summer, I realized that I lacked just one thing: a map. I had some scrawled black lines from the frontispiece of *The Táin*, the Irish poet Thomas Kinsella's 1969 translation of the epic. It's a beautiful translation but not an atlas; the black lines signifying Maeve's route wriggle over ancient Irish place-names. I tried to use the book's pronunciation guide to convert Irish-language consonants from, say, *bs* to English *vs* ("Medb" to "Maeve," for instance—I studied Irish as a callow lass), but soon took the book to another Irish poet, John O'Donohue. He's a native Irish-speaker and a resident of the Connemara Gaeltacht, a district where Irish is nearly everyone's first language. O'Donohue pored over the map. Pointing to a glossary I'd somehow missed, he said, "Cruachan Aí is Rathcroghan. I'd start there."

I took O'Donohue's advice, and set out in the company of my boyfriend, Will O'Leary. Rathcroghan is where the

PHOTOS BY WILL O'LEARY



*Above, the author in Connemara,
on the trail of Queen Máeve.
At right, the route of the Táin*



Táin begins. Today it is little more than a crossroads on the N5 in County Roscommon, deep in the interior of Ireland. But this hamlet, whose remoteness is also its charm, contains three grassy mounds that rise from the fields like gifts from the gods, each of them the remains of an Iron Age ring barrow. The name Cruachan Aí means “Plain of the Mounds,” and on those mounds nowadays in the summertime cattle munch grass, as they have done for many hundreds of years. The largest of the mounds is called Rath Croghan; nearby, a conversation took place that provoked the war fever propelling the *Táin*’s cattle raid.

One night as Maeve and her husband, King Ailill, lay in bed, he taunted her that it was well for her that she had married a wealthy man. “True enough,” Maeve replied. And then, on her hackles, she added, “What put that in your mind?” Immediately Maeve commanded that all her worldly goods be arrayed for comparison with Ailill’s. It was done, and the monarchs proved even in all

measures save for one bull—a white bull that had left Maeve’s herd, “refusing to follow the rump of a woman,” and defected to Ailill’s. Maeve demanded that Ulster’s king lend her the Brown Bull of Cooley, Donn Cuailnge. But her demand went unmet, whereupon Maeve vowed to take the bull by force. She and Ailill—an amazingly compliant cuckold who, taunting aside, never resisted any of Maeve’s lusty demands, in love or war—mobilized all the armies of Connacht against Ulster. Only one gladiator, fighting alone, defended Ulster: Cúchulainn. He was from a clan different from the men of Ulster, who’d been cursed by the goddess Macha with a sickness that came over them whenever war was at hand.

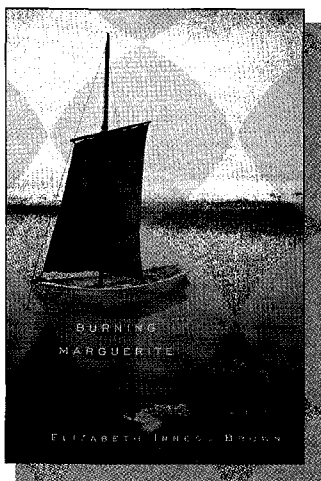
The *Táin* trail, commencing in County Roscommon, moves more or less straight east through Counties Longford, Westmeath, and Meath; turns northward to Dundalk and the Cooley Peninsula, which juts into the Irish Sea; and then

circles back. Along it are 369 places that were named for events in the *Táin* and that still carry those names today. After accosting various locals for information about the *Táin*, I was given my first hot tip: there is now a smartly designed research center called Cruachan Aí in the town of Tulsk, on the N5, not far from the mounds of Rathcroghan. Opened in 1999, the center, with its curves and angles and undulating walls, strives to be to Tulsk what Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum is to Bilbao; like the Guggenheim, on a smaller scale, Cruachan Aí is intended to draw tourists to a depressed area. I loved a poetic inscription on the wall: “We call mythologies those poems of pure thought and fancy, cadenced not in words but in living imagery, mirrors of the mind of nascent nations.”

Will and I climbed Rath Croghan on

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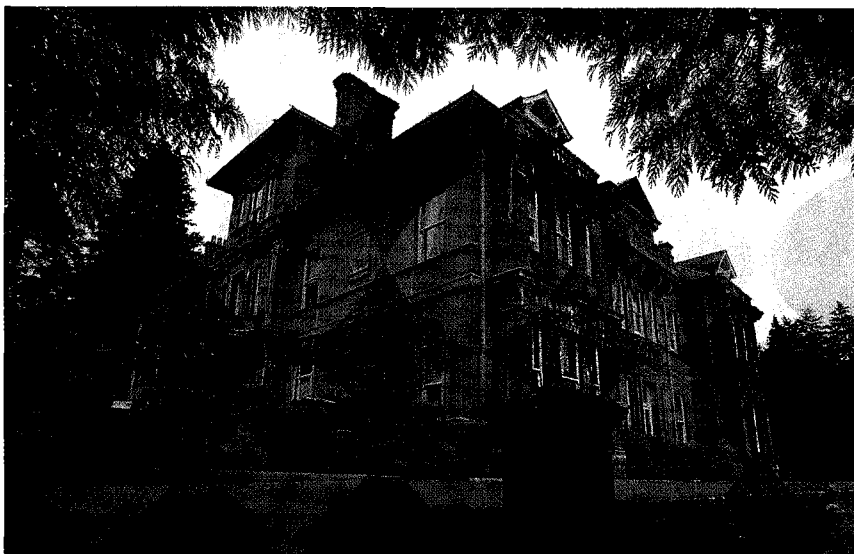
PERSONALITY

PASSION

KNOWLEDGE

COMMUNITY

CHARACTER



Clonalis House, the ancestral home of the descendants of Ireland's last high kings

a day whipped by wind and rain, and I tried to imagine the intimate conversation between Maeve and Ailill that had led to the legend's war. Even in the drizzle we could see five counties from the summit, and there I felt like the Queen of the World, the equal of any hero or heroine. Will, a photojournalist, obligingly took my picture. The photo shows a tiny figure on a wide hill. Looking at it, one can imagine armies spread out beneath.

Maeve and Ailill and their armies camped along the *Táin* route, but there is no need for the modern camp follower to do as they did and bed down in the fields. West of Tulsk, in Castlereagh, is the seat of the High Kings of Connacht, whose family name is O'Connor. For centuries the male line was unbroken—and then in 1966 the last surviving son defected to the priesthood. The family's castle has been in ruins since Cromwell destroyed it, but a version of its name survives with Piers O'Connor-Nash, a nephew who dwells not far from the castle site in a marvelous Victorian Italianate mansion called Clonalis House, set amid 700 acres of woods. O'Connor-Nash, an affable, silver-haired man of fifty, manages Clonalis as a guesthouse, and he graciously invited us to join him by the fire in the library, some of whose volumes date back to the sixteenth century. Over Black Bush Irish whiskey he shared the 1,500-year family saga of battles, some internecine, and lands lost and regained. In the morning, under the gaze of our host's progenitors from the

eighteenth century onward, who looked down stolidly from their oil paintings, we ate a mighty repast.

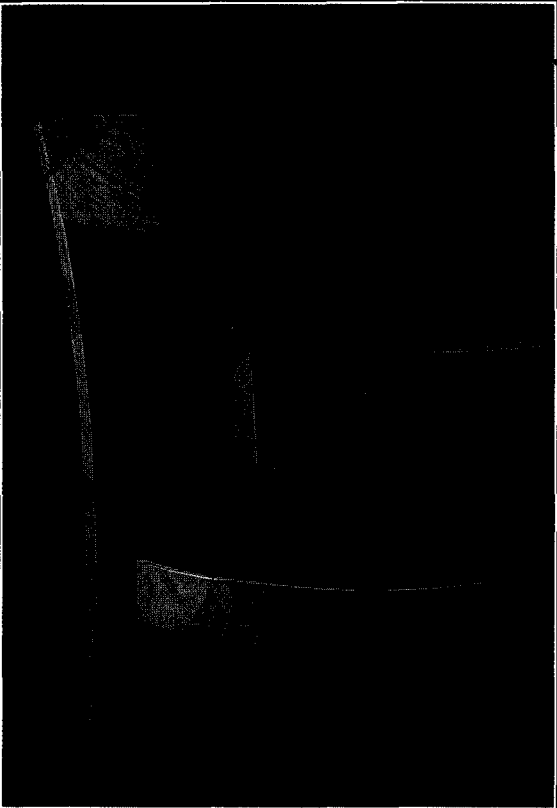
The most spectacular part of the trail is a bit farther along: the Cooley Peninsula and its medieval walled town of Carlingford. Slieve Foy, Slieve Gullion, and the other mountains of the peninsula look as if they're challenging the sky to a duel. Carlingford Lough, across which lies Northern Ireland, is a natural fjord from the Ice Age. The *Táin* is in its way a founding myth, and a sustaining one. Harold O'Sullivan, a Dundalk historian who walked this route with Thomas Kinsella thirty years ago, is convinced that those who wrote the story down in Old Irish were from this very area, so intimately did they know the territory. Here, too, at last, the local tourism board has kicked in with "*Táin* trail maps" and has posted hiking trails. About half the place-names in the *Táin* are in County Louth. For instance, the scene of the "great carnage," a decisive battle in which Cúchulainn slew 130 kings, was the hill of "Focherd," now Faughart, above Murtheimne Plain near what is now Dundalk. Here Cúchulainn exulted, "On whole hosts I wage war to crush their chief hero and Medb and Ailill also."

The *Táin* trail offers up a lot of wonderful supporting material to investigate. Stories that form a kind of prequel to the myth itself explain that Cúchulainn got his fighting name, the Hound of Ulster, at a spot near Emain

Macha, after he killed the king's guard dog and offered himself in its place. Emain Macha, which is in Northern Ireland, near Armagh, about forty-five minutes by car from the Cooley Peninsula, has a fabulous, dramatic circular fort. Will and I walked it with the Queens University archaeologist Jim Mallory, a rugged American who hails from California, and with him Emain Macha came alive for us. The fort was once topped by a ceremonial wooden structure, which around 100 B.C. was burned. Mallory is particularly interested in the medieval armaments described in the *Táin*, but he can quote from all parts of the story, and, standing six feet seven inches tall, he has the look of a *Táin* protagonist.

Emain Macha has fostered another research center, Navan at Emain Macha. An impressive repository of artifacts, interactive videos, and research materials, the center has also functioned as an interfaith gathering site for Catholic and Protestant school groups. Navan is housed in a circular, womblike building, covered with grass and earth so that visitors appear to be entering a mound. Its interiors are made of redwood and copper and stone. Alas, on the June day I arrived in Emain Macha, it was announced that the center was temporarily closing at week's end, because of a lack of funds and other government support. Plans are afoot to reopen the center this month, but the tribe of curators, artists, and scholars who worked there and hosted the site's thousands of visitors annually have already scattered.

It was Navan's director of education, Anne Hart, who told me about a remarkable place to take refuge in these parts: Castle Leslie, in Glaslough, County Monaghan, half an hour's drive from Navan. I will forever be thankful for the tip. The Leslie family—how to say it?—are proud eccentrics who dwell in a magnificent Victorian pile of a lakeside castle on a 300-year-old estate. They are as warm as they are informal and fond of oddities. Upon arriving at Castle Leslie, in the evening, we asked to meet Sir John, the eighty-five-year-old fourth baronet, and were told that, regrettably, this was not possible. He was out nightclubbing. But, we were promised, he would show us around the estate in the morning. At about



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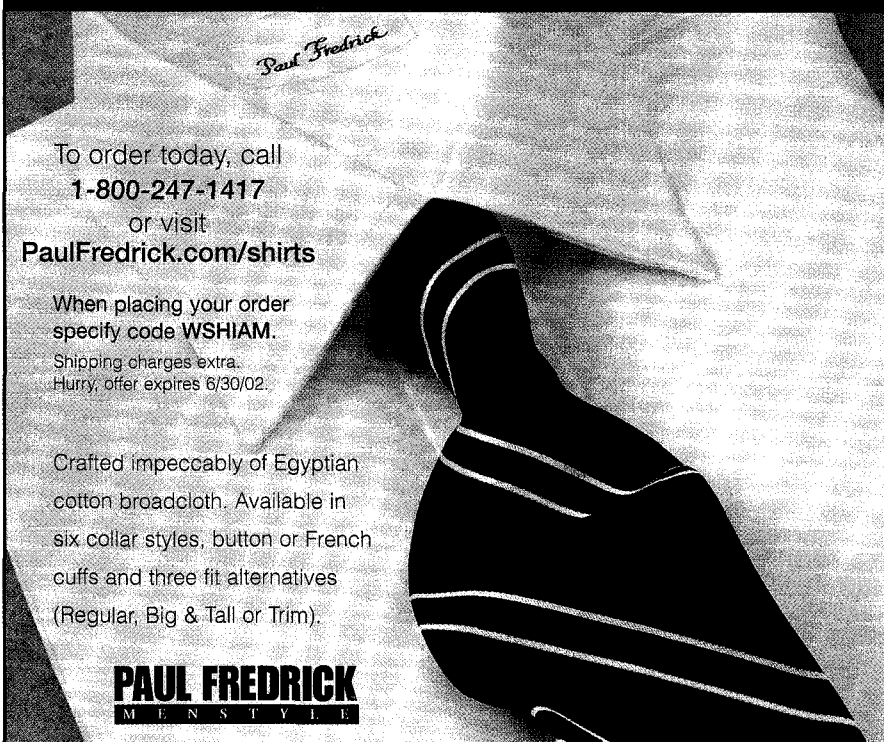
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PAUL FREDRICK
MEN'S STYLE

4:00 A.M. I heard someone with a patrician accent bidding someone else good-night, and then a car driving away. Some hours later, once we were up, the tall, elegant Sir John came in from feeding his peacocks, changed into an impeccable evening jacket and cravat, and proceeded to give us a tour of the house.

The house has galleries, secret passageways, ghosts, and some extraordinary family keepsakes, such as the red shroud of the last Catholic martyr executed at the Tower of London, in 1716. When we arrived at the shroud on the house tour, Sir John turned and held out his hands with a flourish, exclaiming, "It's cuhvuhed in blood!" He concluded the tour with a turn on a Bechstein piano that Paderewski once played. By the way, Castle Leslie serves superb, innovative cuisine based on locally grown and raised ingredients. The chef, Noel McNeel, trained at Chez Panisse—and it shows.

Maeve and Cúchulainn, of course, were never so spoiled. But continuing along the *Táin* trail is much easier after forays into the more recent and elegant periods of history that the likes of Clonalis House and Castle Leslie represent. Next summer, however, I will be camping along Maeve's war route. One John Gilroy, an Irish documentary filmmaker, is getting up a faux army to re-enact half the *Táin* exploits. Though Maeve and her troops—and the White Bull of Connacht, who on her behalf fought the Brown Bull of Cooley—were ultimately defeated, when Gilroy invited me to take the role of the queen, I could not resist. Perhaps we will win on this attempt. See you in the mists of time. **A**

The Web sites for the Republic of Ireland, www.Ireland.Travel.ie, and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, www.DiscoverNorthernIreland.com, contain general information about the *Táin* trail area.

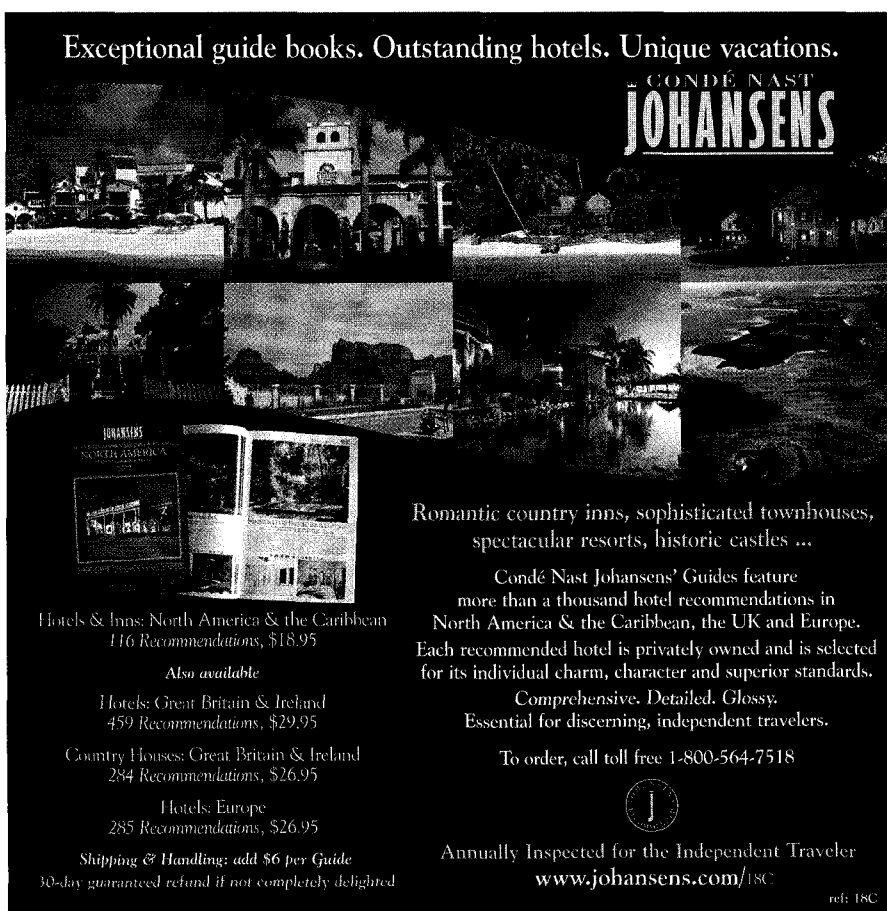
Clonalis House is open April 15 through September 30. The rate for a double room with bath and breakfast is about \$66; call or fax 011-353-907-20014 or e-mail clonalis@iol.ie for more information or reservations. Take dinner at the hotel, because apart from pub food, no other decent dinner is available in the area.

Castle Leslie is open year-round. Rates for a double room for two nights with bath, breakfast, and one evening meal start at about \$164 per person; call 011-353-47-88109, fax 011-353-47-88256, or e-mail info@castleleslie.com.

In Carlingford, Harry Jordan's Townhouse & Restaurant, also open year-round, is a charming small hotel with great food, on the lough with a view from each room. The rate for a double with bath is about \$80; call 011-353-42-937-3223.

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MISSING PIECES

The strange case of the disappearing arias and adagios

BY STEPHEN BUDIANSKY

.....

For several years something distinctly odd has been happening to the classical music played on WETA-FM, the National Public Radio station I listen to in Washington, D.C. From time to time I've read complaints that classical stations were "dumbing down" their programming, or playing only the most popular warhorses, or swearing off twentieth-century pieces, but none of those diagnoses ever seemed quite to match the symptoms.

Clearly, WETA was lopping huge chunks of the standard classical repertoire from its playlists. But trying to divine why some things stayed and some went reminded me of trying to solve one of those kids' brainteasers: Why does Mr. Smithers like artichokes, Valium, and tooth decay but not apples or Turkmenistan? Because he likes only things with three syllables. To be sure, some warhorses remained much in evidence (Ravel's *Bolero*, Pachelbel's Canon, Strauss's waltzes, Holst's *The Planets*), but many other standard works had vanished. Like most classical stations, WETA had never played a lot of opera or other vocal music, but it had played some—for instance, the famous arias that Pavarotti or the Three Tenors had done so well with on stage, screen, and compact disc. Now, for months, I didn't hear any. (WETA has recently begun to bring some vocal music back into its programming.) Well-known keyboard works by Bach and Mozart and Schumann and Beethoven were practically gone too, except in arrangements: the Bach two-part inventions for harpsichord arranged for guitar, Mozart's *Turkish Rondo* for piano arranged for the Canadian Brass, Bach organ fugues arranged for the Philadelphia Orchestra.

At the same time, pieces that no one would call well known or popular began

filling more and more hours each day. For several weeks last summer every afternoon brought another long orchestral work by yet another generally forgotten (though invariably knighted)

Victorian English composer. Twentieth-century music, too, was on the playlists almost every day—lots of big, sweeping orchestral pieces with titles like *Spanish Fantasy* and *Celtic Symphony*, plus film scores—but again, almost none of it was by familiar composers. And although the station still played plenty of complex and challenging music, such as symphonies by Beethoven and Haydn and Brahms, chamber-ensemble

works by the same composers had nearly vanished.

Although the charge of dumbing down didn't seem to explain what was going on, the announcers were becoming more and more nurturing, to the point that I sometimes felt I had tuned in Mister Rogers by mistake. For a while the morning announcer on WETA kept telling me that she was going to play something to "soothe" my workday.

WGMS, Washington's commercial classical station, was meanwhile continuing to play a more mainstream selection of the repertoire, including well-known solo-piano works and string quartets. But here, too, some not quite definable force seemed to be reshaping the playlist. In sharp contrast to what was typical a few years ago, WGMS now never played vocal music, period. Last spring the station dropped its Saturday-afternoon broadcasts of the Metropolitan Opera, joining two other major commercial classical stations—WCRB, in Boston, and KDFC, in San Francisco—in bidding farewell to the Met. Perhaps the oddest thing was that the progression from one piece to the next seemed to lack rhyme or reason. Indeed, WGMS's



basic daytime formula, to the extent there was one, seemed to be a rapid-fire barrage of single movements of concertos or symphonies that left me feeling a bit disoriented.

What, I wondered, was going on here?

The managers of both stations were remarkably forthright when I posed that question to them. Their answer, simply, was that they were not really playing classical pieces at all. They were providing a "sound."

"We don't know for sure how sophisticated our listeners are," Dan DeVany, the general manager of WETA, told me. "But we do know enormous amounts about how our radio station is used—we have tremendous amounts of data on that. And radio is used predominantly as background listening. That's an important fact, because distinguishing that experience from the concert-hall experience informs us as to what kind of music to play."

While insisting that there is no "rigid code" at WETA on what not to play, DeVany acknowledged that he was influenced by the general results of industry surveys in which listeners were played various snippets of music and asked to rate how "positive" or "negative" an "experience" each was. Vocal music was consistently a big negative. So was most chamber music. DeVany believes that's because chamber music "is an extremely intense musical experience." He explained, "In some cases, when you're doing other things, it demands attention, and that may become an irritant—just by the nature of the instrumentation."

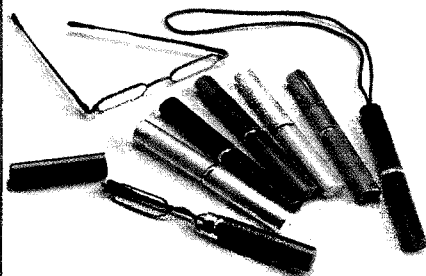
The "sound" that seems to make a background-music-seeking audience content is mainly a bright and smooth orchestral texture, which explains how Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, an *Irish Rhapsody* by Sir Charles Villiers Stanford, and the score to the 1940 Errol Flynn swashbuckler *The Sea Hawk* could all fit the same bill. It also explains why playlists have shrunk so dramatically.

The market research that DeVany cites to back up WETA's programming philosophy comes largely from the "Denver Project," a series of surveys

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and focus groups done back in the 1980s, which aimed to find out what kind of music the people who listen to public-radio news would like to hear when they're not listening to public-radio news. In recent years, as public broadcasters have come under pressure from Congress to cover more of their expenses through corporate sponsorship, stations like WETA have begun to pay attention to market research, which appears to offer formulas for increasing market share.

WGMS, as a commercial station, can afford to spend a lot more on collecting survey data, and it collects data constantly. Jim Allison, the WGMS program director, makes no bones at all about his intensely survey-driven strategic vision. Allison says that WGMS—which ranks No. 4 among all stations in the Washington area, with a weekly audience of close to 400,000—has been drawing significant numbers of listeners from “smooth jazz” and “mix”-format (sixties, seventies, and eighties soft rock) stations. “We’re a quiet, relaxing alternative to rock,” he says. “We have a large audience that do not associate themselves with classical but like the sound.” That fact is a dominant consideration in programming decisions, especially because most of these “casual” listeners (whom Allison contrasts with “the aficionados”) are younger than the usual audience for classical radio: they tend to be in their thirties and forties, rather than over fifty-five, and are a group that the station and its advertisers are eager to attract.

Allison, a classically trained pianist who holds a master's degree from the Peabody Conservatory, in Baltimore, states flatly that in drawing up playlists he is not programming a classical-music concert, and he's most definitely not making selections to match his own tastes. Rather, he considers the core of his job to be “day parting”: providing the particular sounds that listeners who tune in at different times of day are

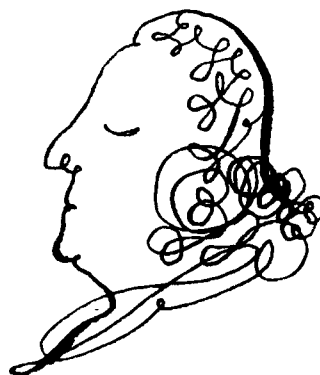
seeking. In the morning, when people are getting ready for work, they want “a good start to their day with uplifting music.” For the morning rush hour Allison programs “energetic” and “lively” selections. “By nine A.M. the majority of the audience is using us as an accompaniment to their workday, so it's middle-of-the-road tempo, not so aggressive.” Afternoon drive time, the station's surveys show, is

harder to characterize. Some listeners want energetic music again, to get them revved up for the commute home, whereas others want to relax, so Allison programs “a combination of up-tempo things” and puts in “a feature we call ‘rush-hour relief’—this

would be a more tranquil piece.”

To help him match the sound to the desired mood, Allison has a database containing descriptions of the music in the station's 10,000-CD library. Selections in the database are categorized according to a couple of dozen adjectives that the station has come up with to define each composition's “mood and energy level”—among them “boisterous,” “pleasant,” “tranquil,” and “lively.”

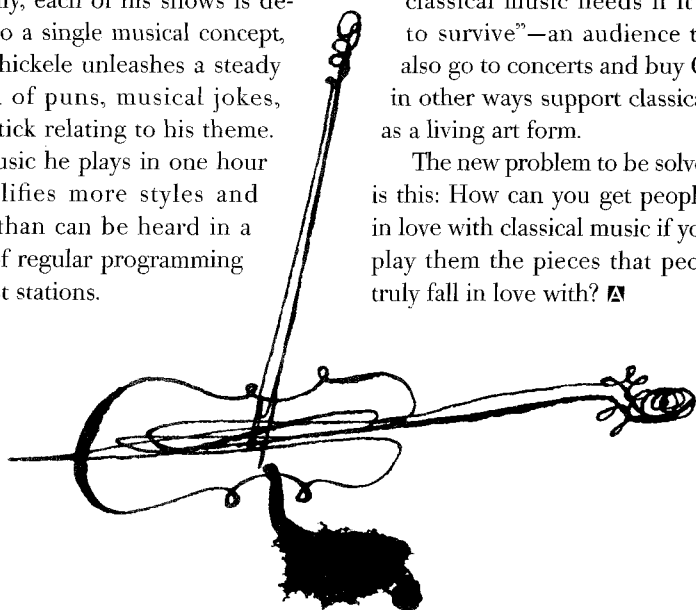
WGMS's surveys, which are done three or four times a year, test audience reaction not only to general “sounds” as defined by compositional period (in the Washington area, Allison says, audiences tend to prefer “Baroque sound, your Bach and Vivaldi,” and “Classical sound, Beethoven and Mozart,” to “Romantic sound”) but also to various specific instrumentations. Allison says that chamber music with strings plus piano or some other instrument tests better than strings alone; Scarlatti played on the harpsichord is a more acceptable sound than Bach on the harpsichord; pieces featuring guitar or flute tend to test very well; Mozart piano and some Chopin test better than more “virtuosic” piano pieces; and Mozart string quartets that “have forward motion, that don't bog down too much in the slow movements,” work. “Organ is a radio turnoff, big time.”



And about 80 percent of WGMS's listeners "do not want to hear vocal music in any way, shape, or form."

Fully a decade ago Peter Schickele, the composer who is also the zany genius behind P.D.Q. Bach, produced a parody of this entire phenomenon in an album titled *WTWP Classical Talkity-Talk Radio*. It features relentlessly happy-talking announcers and a station ID that declares, "WTWP ... listening so easy, you don't even know you're listening" (The station's call letters stand for "Wall to Wall Pachelbel.") Schickele recently told me that the album hadn't even been released when it was overtaken by reality. "I really did hear about one station that wouldn't play pieces in minor keys during daylight hours," he said.

Schickele acknowledges that classical stations face a genuine problem in attracting listeners for serious works, in part because classical music is just not as much a part of the "cultural fabric of the nation" as it once was. But Schickele has been vigorously, and almost single-handedly, bucking the trend toward classical-music-as-Muzak with an hour-long weekly show of his own, *Schickele Mix*. It's practically the antithesis of the homogenized easy-listening sound and the chirpy but inane announcers that are heard the rest of the week on the very stations that carry his show. Schickele dares to be both individualistic and educational—two things that regular programming shuns. Typically, each of his shows is devoted to a single musical concept, and Schickele unleashes a steady stream of puns, musical jokes, and shtick relating to his theme. The music he plays in one hour exemplifies more styles and forms than can be heard in a week of regular programming on most stations.



Schickele's program actually conveys an infectious enthusiasm for music, and it's carried on 125 stations. But the show has run out of funding, and its future is now uncertain. (Tellingly, when the show's producer, Tom Voegeli, began marketing *Schickele Mix*, he found that it was much easier to sell as an "information" show than as a music show. On WETA, for example, it airs right after *Car Talk*, on Saturday mornings.)

Both Dan DeVany and Jim Allison insist that they see themselves not as pandering or as dumbing down classical music but, rather, as providing a welcoming entrée. "To champion classical music is to *invite* people in to listen to it," DeVany says. "And if you do not do that, you will ultimately destroy classical music."

Classical-music enthusiasts who bemoan the trend argue exactly the opposite: that the same programming that so successfully pulls in casual listeners probably guarantees that those listeners will never be anything but casual. "What these stations are doing is not really bringing people in at all," says Mary Davis, a professor of music at Case Western Reserve University, in Cleveland. "You're not getting people to engage with the music when you do things like play a single movement of a symphony. It's like cutting a painting into three pieces and only showing someone the top piece and saying, 'Okay, you've seen the Virgin, you don't need to see the child with that.' This approach will never build the audience classical music needs if it's going to survive"—an audience that will also go to concerts and buy CDs and in other ways support classical music as a living art form.

The new problem to be solved, then, is this: How can you get people to fall in love with classical music if you never play them the pieces that people can truly fall in love with? ▀

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DANIEL*Restaurants worth building a trip around*

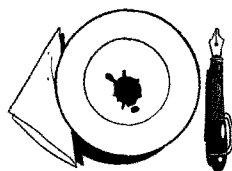
BY CORBY KUMMER

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I usually go out of my way to avoid perfection in a restaurant, ever preferring a place that gives me the simplest and most authentic taste of where I am. Every so often, though, I check in on perfection—usually at Daniel, in New York City. Its singular achievement is to serve what is on any day likely to be the best food in the best dining city in the world with an attitude implying that diners eat this well so often that it doesn't bear mentioning.

This tone, like the tone of all restaurants, is set by the owner. Daniel Boulud may be as temperamental backstage as any French master: I have seen assistants quail at one of his glances, and I've heard numerous tales of the colorful ways in which he and Daniel's executive chef, Alex Lee, can break the purposeful silence that prevails in the most professional kitchens. (These scenes and tales seem tame, though, in light of the picture Anthony Bourdain painted of life at less exalted French stoves in his book *Kitchen Confidential* [2000].) But Boulud's generosity of spirit is evident in the number of faces I recognize in the kitchen from more than a decade of visits to his restaurants. Daniel is the most formal and classic of the three restaurants Boulud runs, which are all in Manhattan and all staffed by people he has trained for many years. They know that there are few better places to learn about food. That's what keeps me going to his restaurants too.

Although I'm tempted by the new and unfamiliar, I usually find myself drawn to the same few things. Whatever else appears on the appetizer menu, for example, I ask for soup. Boulud and Lee like to display their bravura at the very start of the meal; some chefs, thinking that the last impression is the one that will bring customers back, save it instead for the end.

UPPER EAST SIDE
MANHATTAN

Boulud uses the deepest and longest training a French chef can have—birth to a family of restaurateurs in Lyon, the home of French gastronomy; apprenticeship as a teenager with Michelin-star chefs; constant refresher trips home; experimentation with the latest technology—to achieve simplicity, the sure sign of an artist. I thought I knew what garden peas tasted like, for example, having grown up eating as many peas at the vine as I put into the pail. Then I had Boulud's lightly creamy fresh-pea soup, and experienced sweet pea flavor with a new intensity. I wasn't surprised in the following months to find chefs around the country trumpeting the formerly humdrum pea soup as a special spring gift.

Any selection of Daniel's soups shows a virtuosic variation of color and texture, usually around a theme. Recently Boulud sent to my table a warm velouté of cauliflower, Golden Delicious apple, and shrimp, colored bronze from the addition of curry, and a coolly elegant Granny Smith gelée, colored pale green from the celery in the jellied broth and garnished with a spoonful of tarragon-dressed salad of Peekytoe crab. Peekytoe is a delicate and clean-tasting crabmeat that Boulud helped make popular with chefs across the country when he first found it in Maine.

Knowing that Boulud procures various kinds of caviar from that same Maine supplier (Rod Mitchell, of Browne Trading Company, in Portland, who also sells by mail; his latest star product is Iranian osetra caviar), and needing to economize on canapés for a recent gathering, I asked Boulud to create a canapé with salmon roe. Though far less renowned, perhaps because it is far less expensive, salmon roe is a favorite of mine for its bright orange color and the fat beads that pop

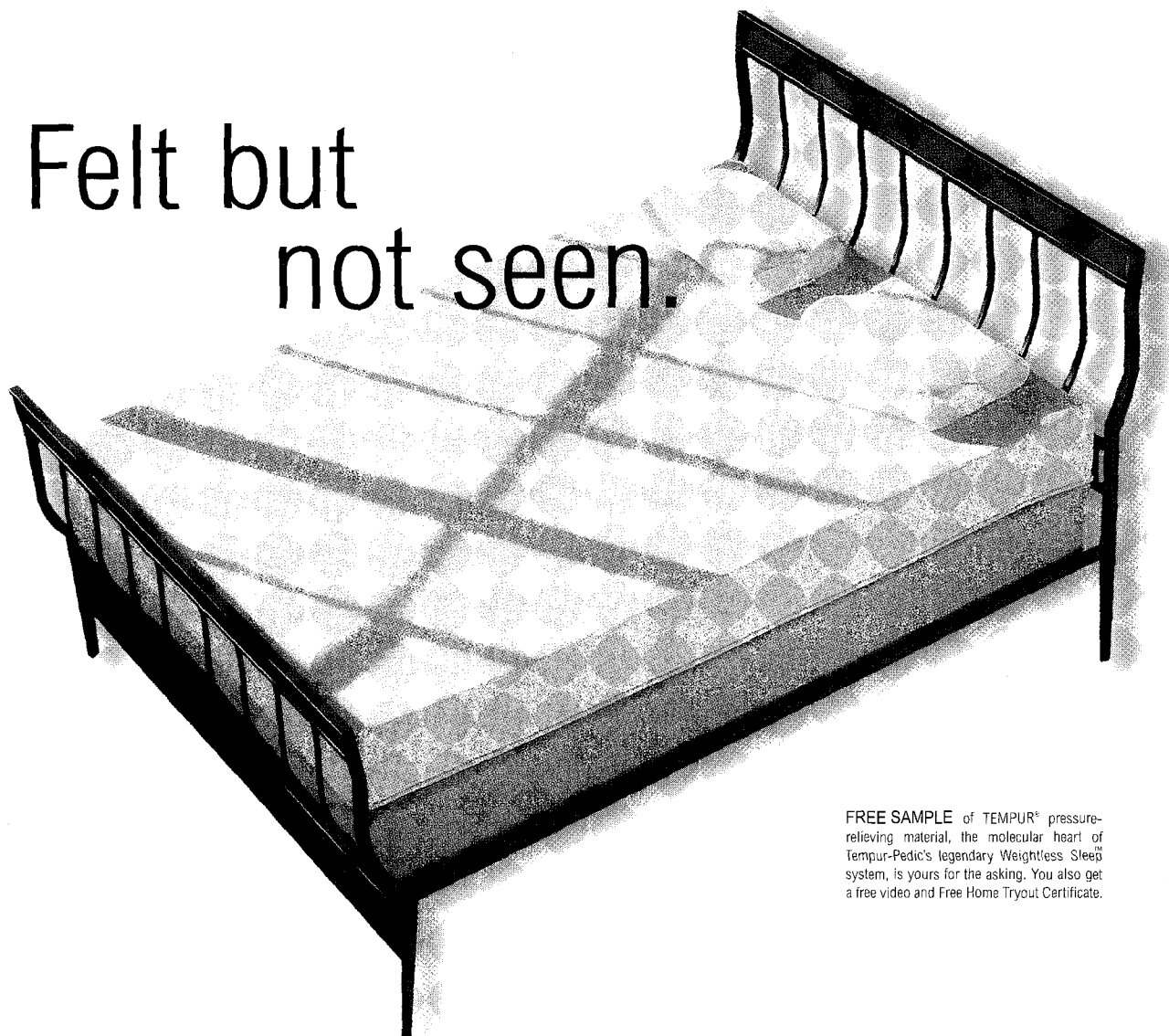
in the mouth. To complement its less authoritative flavor, Boulud reached into his memories of Lyon apprenticeships for *crûte Stephanoise*, a potato pancake with chives, parsley, and black olives. Perfectly crisp, the *crûques* tasted like adult latkes; Boulud, honoring his adopted home town, called them latkes on the evening's menu.

The regular menu at Daniel includes a modest sampling of classics that Boulud learned from his family and early teachers, and also a few dishes he made his signatures when he became a star at Le Cirque, still a temple of New York urbanity. I always ask one guest at my table to order roast squab, which is served with one or another of those French "small sauces" that take days to assemble, and another to order short ribs braised in red wine. I want to remember how squab and short ribs should taste—the farm-raised pigeon lightly gamy and a seeming cross between poultry and red meat, the nearly dissolved ribs soft, sweet, and deeply beefy. And I want to be reminded of why French sauces long ruled the world, and be relieved once again that fashions in home cooking have moved beyond the pot-intensive demands of making them.

Attentiveness to the diner that is neither condescending nor servile; the sense of family deriving from years of collaboration under an owner's strong guiding hand; responsiveness to the daily market; simplicity that reflects a lifetime of practice and learning; definitive flavors that go into the taste memory bank—I know I'll find all these at Daniel. Then there's what these admirable qualities should add up to anywhere a diner is lucky enough to encounter them, yet do not invariably: the sense on faces all around the room that having these particular surprises and jabs of familiarity at this particular meal is just the right thing to be doing. I know I'll find that at Daniel too. ■

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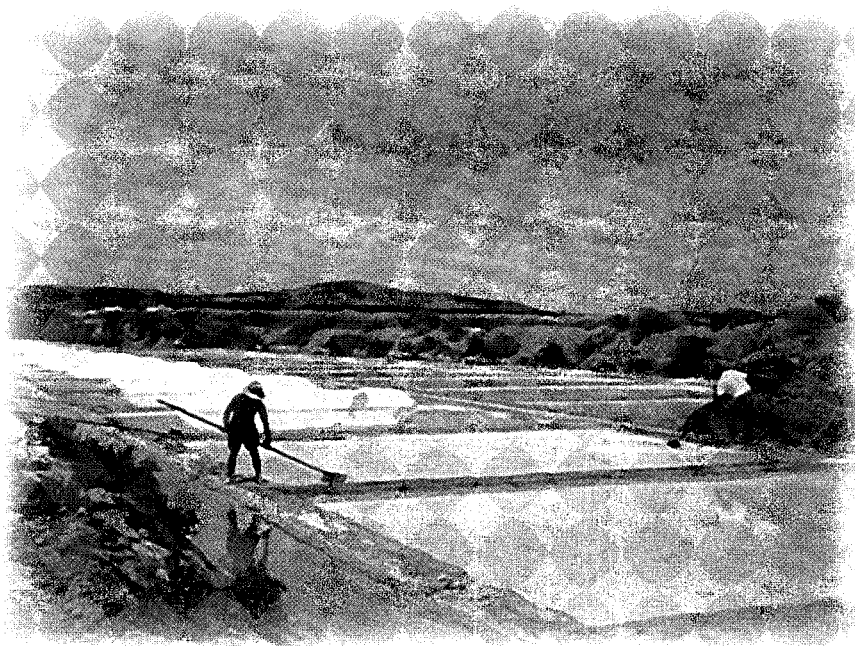
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FOOD

THE CREAM OF THE SALT PAN

Fleur de sel, the best salt in the world, suddenly got less expensive

BY CORBY KUMMER

.....

A few years ago the proprietor of my favorite Boston gourmet shop came up behind me and put something white into my basket. It was a two-pound bag of salt. "We just got this in from France," he said. "*Fleur de sel*, like no other salt you've ever tasted. So sweet, so creamy, so good, you won't believe it." His eyes burned with enthusiasm. "Please try it," he said.

I knew *fleur de sel* from a trip to the rocky Brittany coastline, where workers rake salt from shallow waters in an ancient tradition practiced almost nowhere else. And, I was told, no other salt tasted so rich and fresh. The chef I had come to see, Olivier Roellinger, sprinkles the moist, gray-white crystals on a number of the superb seafood dishes he serves at Les Maisons de Bricourt, his inns and restaurants in the village of Cancale, near Mont-St-Michel.

I had long before left ordinary supermarket salt behind for kosher salt, which has a far gentler flavor with no nasty iodine residue, and whose quantity is much easier to control and judge while cooking. But the *fleur de sel*—from Guérande, on the Atlantic

coast—was a revelation, with distinct mineral tastes and a roundness of flavor I hadn't thought possible from salt. The crystals slightly pricked the tongue and then dissolved, leaving a flavor nearly as sweet as it was salty—a mysterious and marvelous sensation.

I didn't find *fleur de sel* for sale in this country until the proprietor slipped me that bag. I got an idea of why it had taken so long to reach U.S. shelves when the cashier cheerfully told me what I owed her. "You must have added wrong," I said. "I have only some cheese and the salt." "No," she said. "The salt is sixty-one dollars."

It took me a while to recover. In the meantime, salt became the newest weapon in the ever shifting gourmet-chic wars. *Fleur de sel* is now an essential prestige ingredient on American menus, dusted over a dish at the very last minute so that the diner will have the pleasure of the slight crackle and then the quick, delicious melting. Books celebrating salt appeared. The best for cooks is *Salt & Pepper* (1999), by Michele Anna Jordan, unfortunately out of print but easily obtainable. Mark

Kurlansky, the author of the entertaining and erudite *Cod* (1997), has just published a natural companion, *Salt: A World History*. As happens with so many things in the gourmet world, salt became baroque. I started seeing high-priced little bags of colored salt—a designer aberration that seldom has anything to do with flavor—and, much worse, spiced and flavored salt.

Chic aside, *fleur de sel* continues to offer a matchless culinary experience. Last August, in Portugal, I discovered an even sweeter, whiter, and not incidentally much less expensive *fleur de sel* than the one that comes from Brittany. It is harvested by young and idealistic marine biologists whose intention was to produce algae.

The driving force behind Necton, the Portuguese company that harvests the salt, is the very energetic João Navalho, who was born in Mozambique of Portuguese parents and moved to Lisbon as a child. While earning a graduate degree in aquaculture, he and a friend, Vitor Verdelho, won a grant to look for new ways to harness Portugal's natural resources. Bargain-rate plane-loads of German and English tourists should not be alone in taking advantage of the Algarve's sun and sea, the graduate students thought. Those vacationers didn't help the environment, and neither did the big hotels and developments built speedily and carelessly to house them.

The students wanted to use new technology to produce large quantities of algae rich in beta-carotene, which is valuable to food manufacturers who want a safe, non-chemical orange dye. In 1994 the pair began looking for a part of the coastline with maximal sunlight and plentiful clean seawater. After several years of searching they found the spot: thirty-seven acres of salt marsh in the protected National Park of Ria Formosa, just a few miles from the Atlantic and very near the tourist centers of Olhão and Faro. In 1997 the two, by then recent graduates, formed Necton. A few grants and their education constituted their capital, and they

Marenotos raking salt, the Algarve

ran the company on socialist ideals: all workers, whatever their position, would be stockholders and would share profits. Then their plans took an unexpected turn.

For thousands of years salt had been a chief reason that people came to this part of the world. The Egyptians were probably the first to evaporate seawater methodically in order to extract salt, and the Phoenicians probably brought early salt-gathering technology to the Portuguese coast. The presence of Roman ruins in the Algarve suggests that the Romans produced salt there; certainly by the year 1000 the Algarve was sending salt to the rest of Europe, and in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries salt helped Portugal to consolidate its position as a world power.

But the peoples of Northern and Eastern Europe learned to mine rock salt in caves, and by the mid twentieth century mechanization in the mines and cheap transport made sea salt comparatively expensive. Mechanization arrived for sea salt, too, and after World War II the *marenotos*, salt gatherers of the Algarve, largely abandoned their work tending man-made salinas (salt pans) to find jobs in factories and cities. Navalho and his co-workers were disturbed to find that small abandoned salt pans on their own and adjoining property had become communal dumping grounds.

"The place was like a desert," Navalho told me, as he took me on a tour of the sandy flats around the greenhouse-like laboratories where Necton grows algae. "I like to see flamingos and birds. If you don't fill the pans with water every year and you're not taking care of them every day, they'll be dirty, dry, and ugly. And the birds will be gone. Not just flamingos but avocets, plovers, egrets, dozens of others."

Necton's first commitment was to the environment, and that meant keeping the wetlands wet. So plans for algae laboratories waited while the salt pans were put back in order. Necton already employed a *marenoto*, Maximino Guerreiro, who took care of an industrial-scale salt pan on the company's property. Guerreiro cleaned out the clay-bottomed small pans, which

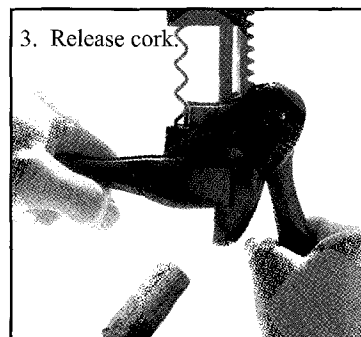
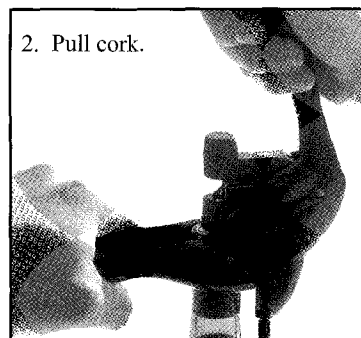
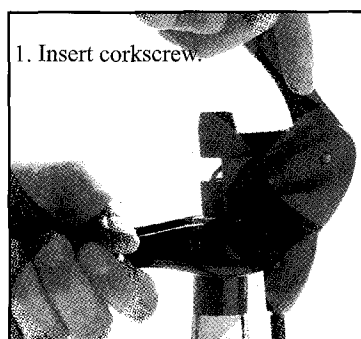
are laid out in a winding patchwork following the border of the tidal-marsh area. Working with young apprentices from Eastern Europe, he cleared the channels that allow water to run between the pans, fed by gravity and controlled by gates. The ancient practice, still followed today, is to let seawater evaporate in progressively smaller, shallower, and lower pools—the salt pans—until the salt is so densely concentrated that workers can just scoop it out of the water. The salt is harvested every five to seven weeks, depending on the heat of the sun and the force of the drying north winds.

I watched as Guerreiro and three shirtless young men bent over shallow rectangular pools of seawater dense with salt, using wooden rakes to draw the salt to the sides of the pans. This was traditional sea salt, the kind that the *marenotos* had collected by hand. Any pebbles or twigs would be sieved out, and the salt would be packaged just as it came out of the pans, its mineral content intact. Mechanically harvested sea salt must be washed and purified to rid it of potential contaminants introduced by machinery; the process robs it of some of its healthful minerals and many of its micro-nutrients. The pyramid-shaped piles of salt the workers had built up at the sides of the pans over the previous days looked like miniature Alps on a blinding winter's day. It was a disorienting image on such a hot morning.

After they broke for lunch and a siesta, the young men returned to the pans. They had exchanged their rakes for long-handled skimmers that looked something like butterfly nets. Again they bent over the water, but now they worked more slowly and deliberately, looking for irregularly shaped micalike formations skittering along the surface, visible only if viewed at the right angle, glinting in the sun. This was *fleur de sel*, the cream of the salt pan—called *flor de sal* in the Algarve. The neonate crystals float for only a few hours, and must be skimmed quickly and daily, before they precipitate to the bottom. I put my hand in the water, which was less than a foot deep, to skim out what looked like an oversized dragonfly's

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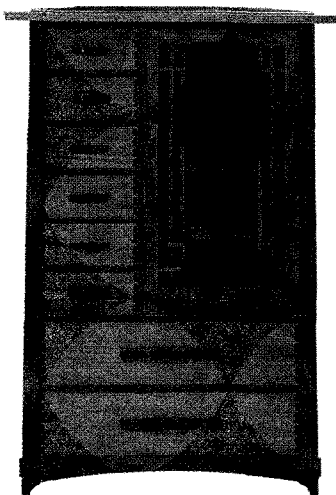


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wing. I crumbled the fragile wet crystals and licked some salt off my fingers. It vanished as fast as if it were indeed snow. The flavor was wonderfully sweet and nuanced.

At the end of the first summer Necton had a crop of dazzlingly white salt. The young directors were thrilled. Then they tried to sell it, and quickly realized why the pans had fallen into such a sorry state.

According to Portuguese law, Necton can't even sell its salt for the table, let alone get anything like a fair price for it. In 1973 the government set standards defining three classes of salt. The highest class is pure sodium chloride—what industry wants, as a primary ingredient for glass, paints, batteries, explosives, and glues. This is also the salt most people buy for the table. Additives such as iodine and fluoride are allowed in table salt, and so are potassium cyanide and aluminum silicate—anti-caking agents that prevent the refined salt from turning to stone. The second class is 96 percent sodium chloride, and the third is below 96 percent—legally speaking, fit only for dumping on roads (the world's chief use of salt is to prevent freezing).

Necton's salt, incredibly, falls into the third class. Hand-harvested, sun-dried sea salt isn't "pure." It contains a far greater variety of minerals than does plain table salt. Some of these, such as magnesium, iron, and calcium, are particularly good for health and occur in relatively high concentrations in unpurified sea salt.

The best Necton could do the first year was to sell its hand-harvested salt at the same price as the mechanically harvested crop from its one large salt pan, even though the former required ten times as much labor. All the salt would go to a processing plant to be "purified."

Help came from the only people selling *fleur de sel*: the French. Starting in the 1970s Guérande, a cooperative on the Brittany coast, had similarly revived old techniques, making Sel de Guérande famous around the world in a very short time—and getting a very high price for it, as my first experience

of buying its salt at home showed. Necton's salt astonished the French, who on seeing it cried, "*Regards, c'est blanc!*" On the Brittany coast rain stirs up clay from the bottom and clouds the water in the salt pans. The elegant-sounding *sel gris* of Brittany is sea salt that gets its gray color from the clay that is raked up along with the salt crystals—mud, to put it bluntly. The sun of the Algarve is far steadier and hotter, and much less rain falls there. Necton decided from the first summer to leave the bottom layer of the pans untouched; both its traditional sea salt and its *flor de sal* are of an unparalleled whiteness.

The Guérande cooperative generously shared experience and technical advice with Necton, and offered to buy its salt for resale. Another idea came from a neighboring nature reserve in the Algarve, where a technician brought together several *marenotos* who were still hand-harvesting salt into a traditional-salt-producers' association, and helped them to obtain what is probably the world's only available certification for unrefined, organic sea salt. Given by a French group called Nature et Progres, the certificate guarantees that the salt has been found free of scores of possible contaminants.

But it hasn't changed Portuguese law. The group of traditional-salt producers is currently petitioning Lisbon to exclude two categories from the restrictions of the infamous third class: traditional sea salt and *flor de sal*. Until it succeeds, it is selling most of its traditional sea salt to the Guérande cooperative, which repackages it (leading people to think, of course, that it is French salt). Necton is handsomely packaging the *flor de sal*, though, and selling it abroad and to a few Portuguese gourmet shops willing to flout the law. Zingerman's, in Ann Arbor (www.zingermans.com), has just received its first shipment of Necton's *flor de sal* and plans to sell it for a good deal less than the French variety.

"We don't want to be the salt kings," Navalho says. Necton just wants to preserve an endangered tradition and the endangered environment that makes it possible. Then it wants to get back to its real work—producing algae. ▀

POETRY OUT LOUD

One of the biggest changes in modern poetry is its escape from the page to the performance

BY PETER DAVISON

.....

Poetry nowadays, with its ability to stimulate both the eye and the ear, needs to be taken in by both at the same time, whether you read it aloud to yourself or have learned to hear it as you read silently. Poetry also has a strange power to evoke persons and events lost in memory as well as to illuminate the self. The epics we know as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* reached their audiences—most of whom could not read but knew the Homeric legends well—through the ear, by firelight and torchlight. The range of the bard's voice limited the ancient audience to the number of people who could gather round. By the time Chaucer had written *The Canterbury Tales*, in 1400, and T. S. Eliot *The Waste Land*, in 1922, audiences had increased in literacy but were still restricted: before readers could share in it, Chaucer's poetry had to be copied out by scribes, Eliot's to pass through the hands of publishers and booksellers. Eventually, the poet as performer began to woo the public again. Dylan Thomas fifty years ago, drunk or sober, declaimed his poems to large crowds, which later bought his recordings to hear him again. Robert Zimmerman, perhaps in order to attract a similarly devoted public, would take the name Bob Dylan.

Editorial writers like to claim, without a lot of evidence, that "poetry is on the move." They rejoice that *Beowulf* is a best seller at last. Does this mean that poetry and democracy have come face to face? That poetry is no longer stuck under the thumb of the learned or even the literate? It might. With recent developments in technology; with poems traveling around the world on the Internet without price, tariff, or tax; with cyber-watchers able to encounter a fresh poem every day of the year, selected from new books and magazines, at poems.com, poetry may be gaining lots of customers. Poems new to print can also be heard in their authors' voices at theatlantic.com and other Web sites every month.

Changes of fashion in poetry, shifts in its aims, may occur for a thousand reasons having to do with those who create it, but the ways in which poetry reaches its readers and hearers have little to do with the poets themselves. What has changed about poetry in our time is not the art of poetry but the technology of mediation.

In two of the most beautiful lines in all his sonnets, Shakespeare wrote of how even the forces of nature must yield to mortality, and asked, "How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea, / Whose action is no stronger than a flower?" Between a poem and its audience something as

delicately powerful as the action of a flower takes place. Robert Pinsky, during his three, important years as America's poet laureate, tried to nurture that relationship by launching the Favorite Poem Project. He asked all sorts of Americans to choose their favorite poems and tell why they chose them; then he and a co-editor, Maggie Dietz, turned to the printing press (*Americans' Favorite Poems*, 1999) and the Internet (www.favoritepoem.org) to explore that interaction. A number of those whose favorite poems appear in the printed anthology were filmed for the Web reciting or reading those poems aloud. The ninety-six-year-old Stanley Kunitz, a recent poet laureate, recites a poem he first encountered seventy-five years earlier, Gerard Manley Hopkins's "God's Grandeur." A seven-year-old boy recites, in cheerful singsong, a poem from Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*. A robust construction worker, perched



MARCELUS HALL

on the step of an earthmover, reads from Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself." William Jefferson Clinton, in the White House, delivers a rather stiff rendering of Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Concord Hymn": "By the rude bridge that arched the flood ..."

So poetry survives in print and in memory, but the book version of *Americans' Favorite Poems* cannot do full justice to why Americans are drawn to those particular poems. The video version, with its extended portraits of some of the choosers, reveals that most of these readers are devoted to a particular poem because something in it reminds them of someone loved—a deceased parent or relative—or of some other loss that can never be repaired. A retired teacher, born in England but recently transplanted to San Francisco, chose to read a Goethe poem, "The Holy Longing," because "There is really no comfort. One doesn't expect one's children to die ... first." A Vietnam veteran, in tears, reads a poem by a fellow veteran, Yusef Komunyakaa, about the Vietnam Memorial in Washington. A family of three embraces a poem by Sylvia Plath called "Polly's Tree" because it reminds them of another Polly, their own daughter, who died of an asthma attack. Not many of these Americans (some of whom are emotionally bound to poems in languages other than English) respond to a poem simply because of its tuneful beauty and grace. No, we tend to think about poetry mainly when it comes time for a wedding or a funeral.

One of the most eloquent responses to a favorite poem is that of Seph Rodney, a young California photographer, who describes his first successful experience with poetry. What woke him up was "Nick and the Candlestick," an incandescent poem by Sylvia Plath about nursing an infant alone in a room, under threat of abandonment.

"It was a date situation," Rodney says. "I wanted to go out with this girl, and I just ended up feeling very bad at the end of it. It didn't work out the way I wanted it to. I just ended up feeling kind of lonely and bereft, I suppose. I came home and I opened this book, and I read some of the poems, and up until that point I think my sense of poetry was that it was always this grandiose ... high-

falutin, not very real way of using language. I looked at this stuff and I could not believe it ... It was powerful, it was rough, it was bitter, it was caustic, it was at the same time really urgent about a need for love. I was amazed that here's a woman who was from a very well-heeled New England existence, and the stuff that she wrote really spoke to me, a man, a Jamaican immigrant. You could hardly get two people in the world more distant in terms of social, economic, intellectual, and religious realities. But she spoke to me. She spoke to me, she spoke, it seems, directly to my life. And because of that I have always loved her work ... I love this poem because it is crazy, because it is headlong, it is brutal, and it does not proceed rationally ... And the last line is like this gift from the gods."

If the reader or the listener is stirred by memory, the poet has been stirred by something else. Poets sacrifice much in their lives—affluence, respect, ordinary social recognition—in order to reach an audience, in the hope that their poems, once launched, may survive their experience, even their own death. Poets, like readers, want to articulate their lives by making poems to speak for their own private experience, especially the extremes of grief and joy. It hardly matters to a contemporary poet by what means a poem reaches its audience, whether it be by declamation, print, recording, or the Internet. And when the poem arrives in someone's life, the life can be changed, however slightly.

Last year the Independent Television Service produced and aired (on PBS) an hour-long documentary film called *Poetic License*. The lives of the young poets whose work it showed have been altered by the urge to create poetry, and they want to testify. This film focused on a series of "teen poetry slams," which show poets and audiences facing one another. (A slam is a competition among performing poets, with judges selected at random from the audience. Adult slams often take place in barrooms or cafés.) These teenage poets were filmed fervidly performing their own compositions for cheering crowds in school auditoriums in San Francisco, New York, and elsewhere, as they vied to qualify for the National

Teen Poetry Slam in Albuquerque. As one of the several sponsors of the project, Sekou Sundiata (described in the press release for the film as "a high-energy, high-intensity poet and performance artist") says, "The American language has been taken over by all sorts of forces that really created a use of language that I don't think people can trust." The young slammers are trying to reclaim the language. Sensitive and lacking confidence in their social position, they use their language to announce themselves.

Poetry takes teenagers by storm. "About a month and a half ago I met poetry, and it was my ventilation," one says. Another claims that poetry is "just a different rhythm from the one I've been given." Kassy Kayiatos, eighteen, of San Francisco, reveals something of her motive when she says, "The most empowering part [of performing poems] is when you feel validated ... by a room full of people that don't even know you." "We're not just writers: we're the formulators for the anthropologists of tomorrow," another declares.

Many of the young poets wear distinctive hats while performing, as a sort of token of identity, of self-discovery. They stride and gesture like rock stars. Despite their bravado, their language, not surprisingly, sometimes sounds derivative. Asheena McNeil, seventeen, of Harlem, asserts, "Poetry is on the move, and you either jump aboard or you get left behind." The rhythms of hip-hop permeate these poems. The kids are not too young to have learned certain dark truths on their own, such as "Hurting is the only way we know we are still alive." Discovering themselves by discovering one another, the teenagers speak hopefully for their fellows. Thus Tim Arevalo, a stocky eighteen-year-old who won the 1998 San Francisco Teen Poetry Slam, ends up declaiming passionately, to cheers, "We are nothing less than great, the world is waiting, holding their breath. They are waiting, the poems are waiting, holding their breath, waiting for us ... Let's start right here, on this mountaintop where we are gods and goddesses, take my hand if you want. And let's write these poems together."

Short video portraits of contestants reveal the highly varied social and ethnic

backgrounds of the kids who find poetry a way of asserting their specialness. Nearly everyone, after all, is part poet at sixteen, no matter how quickly the bloom may fade, and some of these kids find strikingly vivid ways of putting across their innermost concerns and obsessions.

But poetry slams have to be administered by people who know how to organize—and such organizers are not often also young poets. When the Teen Slam competitors from San Francisco and from the Navajo reservation in New Mexico arrived in Albuquerque, they discovered that the competitors from New York City had had to stay home, because no adults had been available to escort them across the country. And although nobody in the competition was any older than eighteen, the organizers had concocted a rule book applicable to adult poetry slams, wherejuries, sharpened by the smell of competition, are more finicky, if less expert, than those in world figure skating. Poets in bars, after all, tend to recite expansively and are, for good reason, limited to three-minute stints; but the kids in Albuquerque, when faced with such restrictions, cheerfully rebelled and took to the stage as a group to protest adult control. They frolicked in an impromptu dance, and happily chanted their poems to and for one another, delighted to be ignoring the idea of an adult-imposed contest. Competition in the prescribed sense went out the window.

But then, poems do not compete, do they, even though adult poets may? The youngsters clearly thought of this poetry conclave as a love-in. Jason Mateo, eighteen, of San Francisco, said en route to Albuquerque, "It's real good to, like, to chill with poets ... you get all creative together and everyone starts just getting on this whole other level." The young have a lot to overcome, but they believe they can help strengthen one another. They believe they are unlimited in energy. They believe they could be immortal. Whereas poetry's readers and listeners are reminded of the dead, of memory, of loss, the youngsters at their clamorous slams revel in self-discovery, in newness. "O brave new world / That has such people in it!" cries the girl Miranda in *The Tempest*. To which her father, Prospero, replies, "'Tis new to thee." ▀

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THE BEAUTY OF THE CONJURING

The pernicious power of fine storytelling is a central theme in Ian McEwan's new novel

BY CLAIRE MESSUD

.....

Encountering Ian McEwan's prose is rather like meeting an extremely good-looking person. We experience a strange confusion of expectations.

Rationally, it seems that this extraordinary surface must suffice, and yet we project and imagine far more than could ever be realized: this person, so attractive, cannot be, and yet must be,

also brilliant and charming and witty; this prose, so fluid and elegant, so vivid and meticulous, cannot possibly carry, and yet must certainly carry, a narrative of great moment, insights of otherwise ineffable grandeur.

Experience teaches us, however, that good looks betoken nothing certain about their possessor; and it might be unwise to presume that McEwan's novels owe us anything greater than the textures and odors his diction so powerfully elicits, or than the satisfying musical rhythms of his sentences. Add to these not inconsiderable gifts his power to compel—because McEwan forces his readers to turn the pages with greater dread and anticipation than does perhaps any other “literary” writer working in English today—and we have before us so fine and controlled a stylist that we may imagine we cannot ask for more; surely these are pleasures enough.

But as McEwan himself, vivisectionist of the human psyche, knows so well, we are a voracious, even an insatiable, species. Beautifully evoked

scenes prompt a search for meaning, an analytical will. We want not merely to be carried away—we want to know why. We want form and content seamlessly

to unite, so that the story before us has about it a solid inevitability. McEwan, aware of this desire, wants to comply; it is a desire that he, too, clearly feels. In the

past his fiction has acceded to that urge for narrative tidiness, often at the expense of the truest realism. But his memorable new novel, *Atonement*, makes clear that he is painfully alive to the dangers of that desire: the pernicious power of fine storytelling is one of the book's central themes.

Briony Tallis, thirteen at the novel's opening, is its writerly protagonist. As we meet her, she is preparing her first play, *The Trials of Arabella*, for a performance to mark her elder brother's visit home. *Atonement's* lengthy and magnificent opening section—a tour de force that in scope and in prolonged intensity outstrips the opening of McEwan's earlier novel *Enduring Love* (1997)—is set in Surrey at the height of summer in 1935. Briony hovers at the end of childhood but lives her fantasies with an adult fierceness, wondering to herself, “[Was] everyone else really as alive as she was? For example, did her sister really matter to herself, was she as valuable to herself as Briony was? Was being Cecilia just as vivid an affair as being Briony?” Although she knows rationally that this must be so, she is also enamored of herself *as a writer*, and

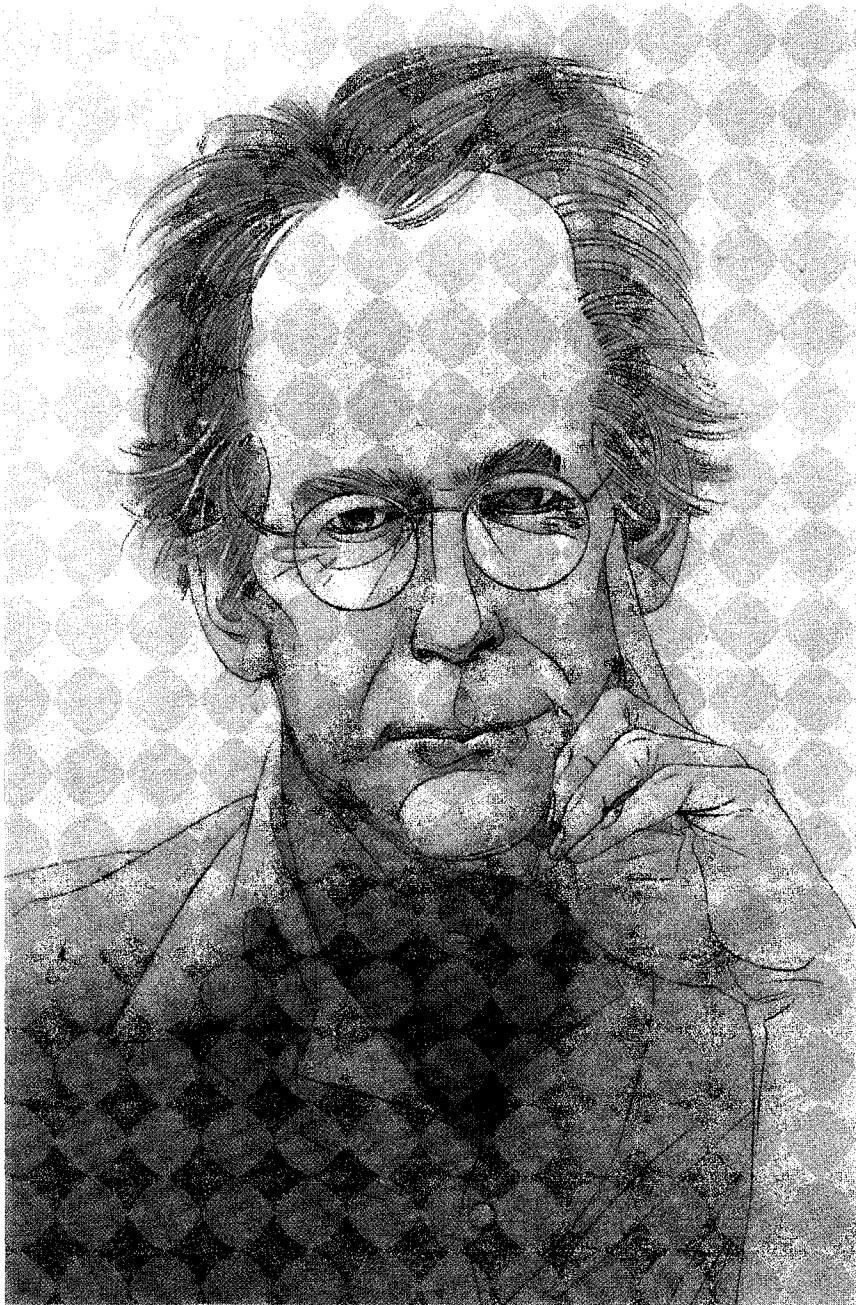
believes that writing imbues her with greater powers.

A story was a form of telepathy. By means of inking symbols onto a page, she was able to transfer thoughts and feelings from her mind to her reader's. It was a magical process, so commonplace that no one stopped to wonder at it. Reading a sentence and understanding it were the same thing ... There was no gap during which the symbols were unravelled.

Hers is a childish and arrogant faith, dangerously let loose upon the household that surrounds her. That communication is composed of vast gaps and desperate, distant signals is something Briony will learn through suffering—her own, eventually, but more immediately other people's.

Atonement, like all McEwan's novels, is suspenseful, and it would not do to reveal all the events that unfold in this single summer evening before the war. What can be said is that Briony—awaiting the arrival of her brother, Leon, and his friend Paul Marshall while suffering the presence of her cousins Lola, Jackson, and Pierrot Quincey—witnesses a curious scene in the garden between her elder sister, Cecilia, just down from Cambridge, and a young man named Robbie Turner, a servant's son and a protégé of Tallis *père* who has grown up alongside the Tallis children. Cecilia is carrying flowers in a vase, over which the pair tussles, and then Cecilia strips to her underwear and plunges into the garden's fountain while Robbie looks on. Briony is old enough to recognize the complexity of what she witnesses but perhaps not old enough to see that it is a matter of reality, not of story.

She could write the scene three times over, from three points of view; her excitement was in the prospect of freedom, of being delivered from the cumbrous struggle between good and bad, heroes and villains.



None of these three was bad, nor were they particularly good. She need not judge. There did not have to be a moral. She need only show separate minds, as alive as her own, struggling with the idea that the other minds were equally alive.

And yet by her very construction of events Briony passes judgment, determines “good” and “bad”: as the evening unfolds, her interpretation of each action and interaction around her is shaped by her understanding of what she has seen, and although she believes absolutely in the inevitability of the story she constructs, we can see that

it is partial, in both senses of the word. Needless to say, the story Briony tells has terrible consequences.

This is, of course, vintage McEwan: the struggle between the internal life, so much more vivid than the lives outside it, and the unbending force of reality is a theme he has long explored. He has frequently led us into the fantasy worlds of the unsavory, from the haunting pedophile narrator of the early story “Butterflies”; to the menacingly nerdy Leonard Marnham, of *The Innocent* (1990), whose fantasies of violence against his girlfriend, Maria,

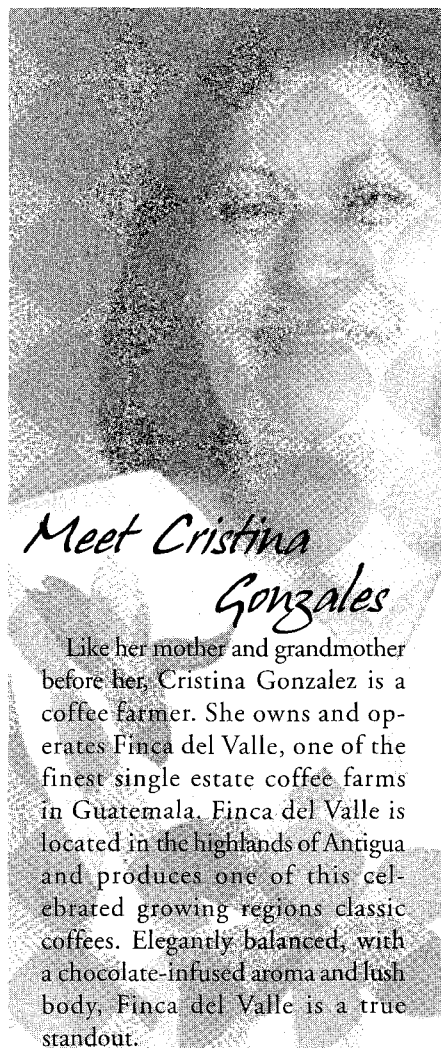
are so powerful that he comes to believe she must share them; to the stalker Jed Parry, of *Enduring Love*, and his effects on the psyche of Joe Rose. For McEwan, the internal life may be a form of ideology as well as fantasy, a framework through which his characters construe and misconstrue the world. In *Black Dogs* (1992), June Tremain’s spiritual interpretation of her attack by a pair of slaving beasts on an isolated path in France in 1946 leads her to separate from her husband, Bernard, whose rationalist view guides him to politics.

But Briony is a storyteller, and in this she differs from her predecessors: she undertakes to shape and describe the world around her with, significantly, a pretense of objectivity. In so doing, however, she confuses imagination and reality as forcefully as do Leonard Marnham and the pedophile of “Butterflies.” When her nine-year-old twin cousins, Jackson and Pierrot, go missing, Briony embarks on a search, and imagines them drowned in the swimming pool.

It made sense, surely, to see if the twins were there, fooling about with the hoses, or floating face-down, indistinguishable at last in death. She thought how she might describe it, the way they bobbed on the illuminated water’s gentle swell, and how their hair spread like tendrils and their clothed bodies softly collided and drifted apart. The dry night air slipped between the fabric of her dress and her skin, and she felt smooth and agile in the dark. There was nothing she could not describe.

Suddenly Briony’s powers of description are McEwan’s, the seductions of her luscious vocabulary his. The twins have not drowned; and yet Briony has drowned them. Of what else might she be capable? The glorious prose (isn’t this enough? we have wondered) is revealed to be the ultimate peril.

If Briony and McEwan are in some measure indistinguishable in this novel (and only in the novel’s conclusion do we discover how profoundly this is so), there remains, owing to McEwan’s subtleties, a distance between them, a distance that articulates itself in a new raggedness of form and in a self-conscious insistence on the novel’s



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story-ness. In these two elements *Atonement* most closely resembles *Black Dogs*. That book is a tale told in retrospect, and convolutedly, through the intermediary of the narrator, Jeremy, son-in-law of the Tremaines. The scene in which June is attacked, the crux of that novel, is not revealed until the end; but it defines all that has come before, symbolically and intellectually as well as narratively, just as *Atonement*'s opening section fatefully determines what will ensue. *Atonement* differs from *Black Dogs*, however, in that its asymmetrical, telescopic structure almost resists the McEwan penchant for resolution: part one is followed by three segments, two of which take place at the beginning of World War II—one in France, recording the fate of Robbie Turner, and the other in London, where Briony is becoming a nurse at St. Thomas's hospital. Each of these three segments is essential yet strangely discrete; and an attendant and intriguing diminuendo as the novel progresses is reversed only in the book's fourth and final section. Set in near-contemporary London, this brief first-person narrative ties the novel together. It does so neatly—perhaps too neatly for this reader's taste (and with a twist, of course)—but that very neatness is suspect in light of all that has come before, and we know that McEwan, too, knows it to be suspect.

This formal self-consciousness is inseparable from the other ways in which the story insists on its story-ness. True, McEwan has toyed with it before—in the opening sentence of *Black Dogs*, for example: "Ever since I lost mine in a road accident when I was eight, I have had my eye on other people's parents." We are compelled to continue, even as we absorb the sign that this is a story we are being told. In real life it is mercifully rare that children lose both parents in a car accident; in fiction, however, it happens with alarming frequency. To be thus orphaned, and to be seeking to replace missing parents, is to call upon a host of fictional forebears: Jeremy is letting us know that he is a *character*, however deftly and roundly drawn, rather than a person. So, too, the opening of *Amsterdam* (1998), which gathers Molly Lane's

lovers at her funeral, echoes not experience as we know it but rather fiction and film (*The Man Who Loved Women*, for example). But these suggestions of artificiality are mere traces, and hence seem unwitting evidence of the well-made story rather than an intended exposition of its inner workings.

The opening of *Atonement*, on the other hand, overtly summons a number of literary references, and thereby insists rather volubly on its fictionality. It recalls *Northanger Abbey* in its epigraph, and *Mansfield Park* in its theatrics, as Briony prepares *The Trials of Arabella* for the stage. In the depiction of Briony herself—"she kept a diary locked by a clasp and a notebook written in a code of her own invention"—we see many heroines of girls' fiction from Enid Blyton novels to *Harriet the Spy*. In the solid, prosperous (but modern, and hence fake) Tallis house, set in its parkland, and in the gathering of guests in that house, we find echoes of the interwar house-party genre (Evelyn Waugh, say, or Anthony Powell; or that masterpiece of cinema, Jean Renoir's *The Rules of the Game*). Then, too, there are the characters' names: Leon, Briony, and Cecilia are overdone enough; but what of the Quincey cousins, Lola, Jackson, and Pierrot? *We are characters*, these names announce. And this is a story.

Paradoxically, it is apparently this very acknowledgment, this frank playfulness, that liberates McEwan to follow his characters more honestly than ever before, with less bending to the demands of narrative satisfaction. Gone are the grotesqueries of Leonard and Maria's dismembering Otto in *The Innocent*, the sexual menace of the mythical Nazi hounds in *Black Dogs*, the histrionic kidnapping and gunplay of *Enduring Love*. There are memorable descriptions of hideous events in the second and third sections of *Atonement*, but they are depictions of the surreality of war. These sections are not stylishly impressive or slick in the way of the book's first 150 pages; nor are their comedies as evident. They lead us not into the psyches of the unhinged but into the psyches of ordinary people in an unhinged time. Seeing as they see, thinking as they think, we draw something new,

smaller and quieter, from McEwan's gifts. Robbie, while retreating across France, reflects, "No one would ever know what it was like to be here. Without the details there could be no larger picture." And yet, thanks to McEwan, we are granted those details.

[Robbie] had been going for about ten minutes when he saw Mace's head on the grass by a pile of dirt. It was about twenty-five yards away, in the deep green shadow of a stand of poplars. He went towards it, even though he suspected that it would be better for his state of mind to walk on. He found Mace and Nettle shoulder-deep in a hole. They were in the final stages of digging a grave. Lying face-down beyond the pile of earth was a boy of fifteen or so. A crimson stain on the back of his white shirt spread from neck to waist.

We are given access, too, to the trials that Briony—a mere nursing probationer at St. Thomas's hospital—must bear. She is sent, for instance, to dress the face of a patient, Private Latimer.

[She] could see through his missing cheek to his upper and lower molars, and the tongue glistening, and hideously long. Further up, where she hardly dared look, were the exposed muscles around his eye socket. So intimate, and never intended to be seen.

There is nothing storylike about these visions, nothing tidy, no narrative advantage to their telling. Reading McEwan's work, we often find it impossible to slow down, so powerful is the pull of "What next?" In *Atonement* that pull lures us through the first section at breakneck speed, and reasserts its sway in the last. But in the second and third segments of the book a strange and fine thing happens: we are free to linger in the moment, to savor the exquisite, agonizing aptness of McEwan's images and the delicacy of his touch as he records, in fiction, the true horrors of war, and makes new the ordinary realizations those horrors force upon us—Robbie's longing for children, say, and Briony's recognition "that a person is, among all else, a material thing, easily torn, not easily mended." We see at last that the beauty of the conjuring is indeed enough; and that its meaning—in all its ambiguities—lies before us. ■

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LEAVING IT TO THE PROFESSIONALS

Clearing away clutter is no substitute for keeping house

BY CAITLIN FLANAGAN

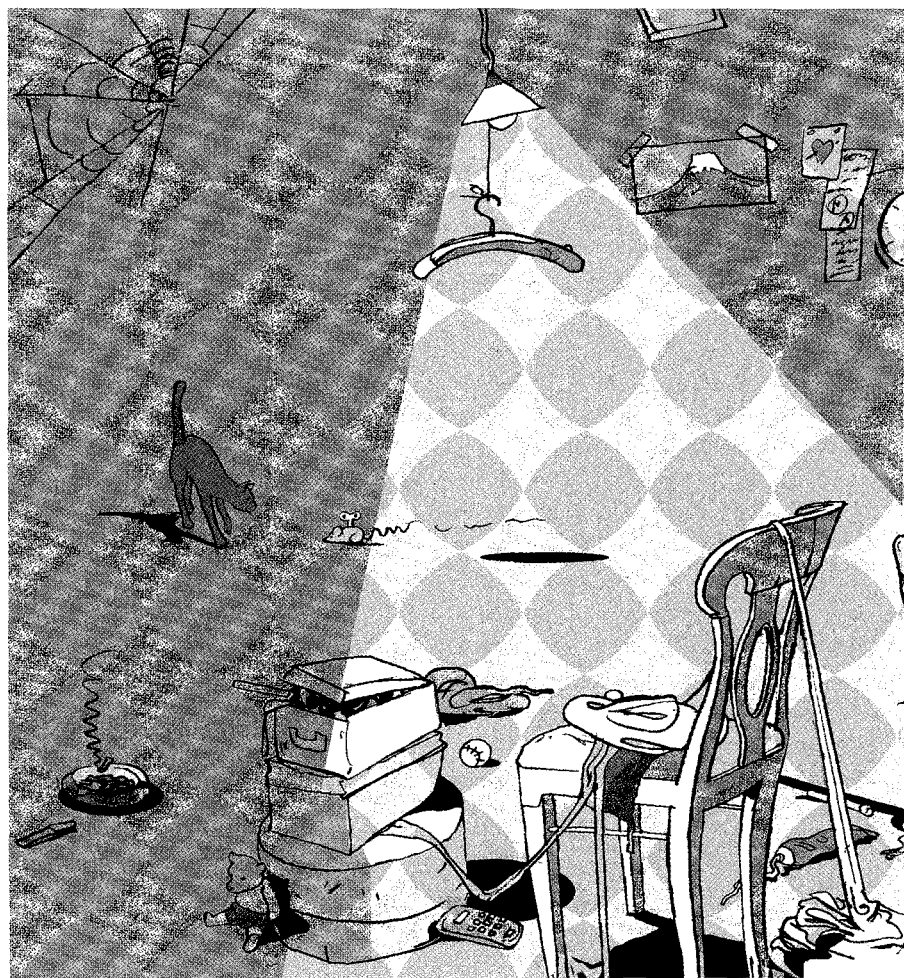
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Two days after Christmas, I rolled a huge shopping cart into the home-organization department of the Burbank Ikea and threw in so many baskets and boxes and under-bed storage units that my small son (who had been standing in the front of the cart, navigating) decided to clamber out, leaving just enough room for a big wicker hamper. We were there because the prospect of cleaning up the house after Christmas had struck me as unpleasant and oppressive, whereas the prospect of driving out to Burbank and eating a meatball lunch in the Ikea cafeteria had struck me as attractive and spirit-lifting. Best of all, we would not be shirking the work back home; we would be beginning it—or so I persuaded myself. For, like many women of my proximate age and social position (householders, mothers, irritable presiders over vast domestic holdings of Lego blocks and takeout menus and teetering stacks of unexamined shop-by-mail catalogues), I am preoccupied by clutter; almost every domestic task seems to begin (and also to sputter out) in an effort to eliminate it, or at the very least to assign it to a well-chosen receptacle. This shared preoccupation has given rise to a wide host of American phenomena, only one of which is the Ikea home-organization department.

The anti-clutter movement is enormous, having spawned countless books along with magazine articles (and actual magazines), videos, classes, catalogues, and the 1,500-member-strong National Association of Professional Organizers. The “Eastern art” of feng shui is practiced in thousands of upscale, with-it households, and it proceeds from a “clear your clutter” premise. Anti-clutter campaigns make for excellent voyeur sport; the visits to *Oprah* of the master organizer Julie Morganstern are never disappointing. Sometimes Oprah has Morganstern perform spot inspections of Harpo employees’ offices, events that offer superb moments of reality televi-

sion: office doors swinging open in the manner of an FBI raid; shocked workers blinking into the camera lights, caught *in flagrante* with their overflowing mail crates and ripening piles of exercise clothes, their half-eaten lunches moldering on paper-strewn desktops. Far more entertaining, however, are the home visits, which are not feared but, rather, highly coveted, and for which the competition is stiff. Viewers write long, importuning letters describing unabashedly the slovenly states of their homes, which they will gladly reveal to a national television audience if only Oprah will send them some help. If the winner is really lucky, it is Morganstern herself who will make a visit, bringing along her Hefty bags and plastic sorter

baskets and brisk “nothing shocks me” professionalism. The houses are never squalid; what they are is crammed to the gunwales with stuff—stuff that’s been packed into drawers and cupboards and closets, no rhyme or reason to it, and not an inch of space to spare. No matter how big the kitchens are (and many of them are plenty big), they are never big enough, in part because the success of buy-in-bulk superstores has left people with an astonishing, pre-apocalyptic quantity of supplies. The video tour that begins each segment often reveals curious, forgotten outposts of spaghetti sauce or Formula 409 in the garage or beneath the stairs. No matter what area of the house is under consideration (medicine cabinet, linen closet, kids’ rooms), it is sure to be an absolute horror. In the old days, of course, this kind of general chaos would occasion a thorough spring-cleaning, with the children sent upstairs to clear out the mess underneath their beds, and Dad dispatched to the garage under similar

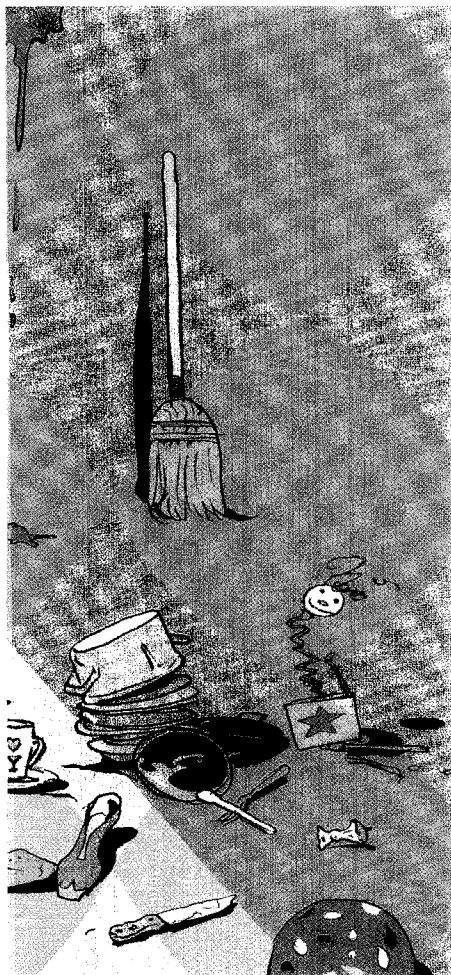


orders. But nowadays the home is foreign territory, a kind of very large hotel suite unintended for long-term habitation, and when the whole thing gets so overstuffed that it threatens to explode, the time has come to call on an expert.

The experts, Lord knows, are sympathetic to the psychological magnitude of tidying the house. *The Zen of Organizing*, which is studded with the inspirational words of boffo organizers from Plutarch to Martha Graham (although nothing at all from Joe Stalin, who by all accounts ran a very tight ship), begins with a description of how the author, Regina Leeds, sits with her clients, "calming" them before they open a single drawer: "We consciously leave fear and judgment behind." They also dress carefully and eat sensibly before beginning the work. Many authors of anti-clutter books mention cluttering as a possible manifestation of obsessive-compulsive disorder, and it is not uncommon for them to discuss pharmaceutical

approaches to dealing with a hall table heaped with Pennysavers and unsolicited AOL start-up disks. *Stop Clutter From Stealing Your Life*, by Mike Nelson, opens with a disclaimer: "I am not a professional organizer, psychologist, or psychiatrist," Nelson tells us in all earnestness, and his book (which is couched in the language of twelve-step recovery programs) includes a chapter on "the medical view" of clutter and another on how clutter can disrupt a person's sex life, which goes far beyond the logistical problems posed by too many back issues of *The New Yorker* fighting for space in the marriage bed.

Practitioners of the many home-organization philosophies adhere to a few basic tenets, central among them the solemnly held belief that any possession—no matter how serviceable or expensive—that is stored unused and forgotten in a closet or a cupboard will eventually metastasize into clutter. Once this happens, there's hell to pay. The moment your stylish black-and-chrome cappuccino machine makes the terrible one-way crossing from "appliance" to "clutter," it stops simply occupying valuable shelf space and becomes an enemy within your home, capable of draining your energy, sapping your chi, interrupting your sleep, and generally bumming you out. Step one for the professional organizer is persuading the owner of said cappuccino maker to get rid of the thing before it causes real problems. This is often an uphill battle; for one thing, the owner may still be smarting over the 1,200 clams she forked out to Williams-Sonoma for the really *good* cappuccino maker, the one with the energy-efficient standby mode. Once she has been convinced of the need to chuck the thing, however, the method of disposal is almost irrelevant—although I'm often surprised, given how expensive many of these items are, at what short shrift the notion of hosting a garage sale gets. ("Ugh! Not worth it!" the Washington, D.C.-based organizer Jill Lawrence said when I broached the subject, telling me that garage sales make sense only if one is "on disability" and therefore broke, or new to the neighborhood and therefore lonely—a combination that stigmatizes the enterprise pretty effectively: "Garage Sale Saturday:

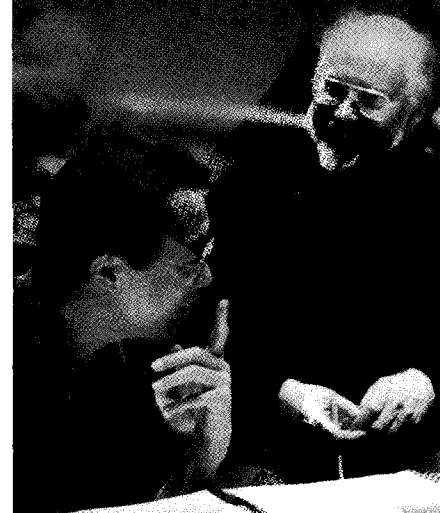


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Broke and Lonely, Everything Must Go.") Some disposal suggestions are peculiar in the extreme. "Take pictures of any items which are simply too bulky to store," recommends Harriet "The Miracle Worker" Schechter in her book *Let Go of Clutter*, and "then bid a fond adieu to the actual objects." It's a suggestion that would surely lead to some mighty odd conversations way down the road: "Hey, Granny, what's *this*?" "Why, that's a snapshot of my old standby-mode cappuccino maker, Johnny! Top of the line!"

Even more paralyzing than the prospect of letting go of one's expensive impulse purchases is the thought of hauling out and categorizing the thousand smaller things: the handfuls of half-sorted mail; the videotapes with and without their boxes; the reams of children's artwork; tangles of unmatched socks; outgrown Little Mermaid costumes; multiple packages of Imodium, most of them expired (the stockpiling and subsequent discovery and disposal of expired medications is a gold mine for drug companies); the birthday-cake candles and unspent Chuck E. Cheese tokens and overdue notices from the library, all shoved into kitchen drawers—the whole miserable mess that is American family life as it is lived at a certain economic level. These debilitating decisions must be made one at a time, with the organizer instilling certain precepts in the client as they work. The professionals insist, for example, that householders designate a consistent "home" for each of their possessions, so that they don't end up with what Jill Lawrence calls "thirteen hammer syndrome," in which it becomes easier to haul ass down to the hardware store and buy a new hammer every time you need one than to spend a frustrating hour looking for an old one. ("But that's obvious," an acquaintance of mine said in disbelief when I explained this concept to him. "You'd be surprised," I told him.)

The organizers want clients to hew their household possessions down to the barest kit, augmented only by items of considered emotional or aesthetic value. Certainly, only a masochist would object to Harriet Schechter's recommen-

dation that one throw out one's Dear John letters and "hate mail," but there's a sense in many of these books that *any* kind of saving is inherently problematic, dysfunctional, bad. Judith Kolberg, the author of *Conquering Chronic Disorganization*, makes gentle fun of one of her clients, an elderly woman (the Greatest Generation tends to take a pounding in these books) who has saved margarine tubs for years. The woman's husband has tried to cure her by buying her a full set of Tupperware, and she has even "briefly sought counseling." But still she holds on to the tubs. She refuses to throw them in the recycling bin, for which I admire her. Recycling is one of the favorite quick fixes of the organizers, but of course the best way to recycle something—the method that depletes



the fewest resources in the process—is simply to *use it again*, which of course necessitates saving it until a use presents itself. The resourceful Kolberg finds a charity that serves poor women and will be happy to take the tubs: "Welfare mothers are too poor to purchase Tupperware," she informs us, "and too thrifty to throw away leftovers." At last the old woman happily relinquishes most of her cache. The episode is presented as a triumph for the organizer (she got the clutter out of the house!), but of course it was really a triumph for the old woman, who knew instinctively that good plastic bowls with air-tight lids ought not to be thrown out with the trash.

The sneaking suspicion I often get from reading such books is that the real purpose of cleaning out the closets is simply to make room for more stuff. Karen Kingston's best-selling *Clear*

Your Clutter With Feng Shui tells the inspirational story of a woman who attended one of Kingston's workshops and got so fired up about a clutter-free life that she called Goodwill and said, "You are going to need to send a truck!" She "cleared out her ancient stereo system, stacks and stacks of junk, and all but five items of clothing from her wardrobe," thereby releasing "huge amounts of stuck energy, which created space for something new to come in." What exciting "new" thing would be coming? An unexplored talent? A zeal for charitable giving? No—more stuff! "A week later she received a check in the mail from her mother for \$8,000, and she went straight out and bought herself a new sound system, a whole new wardrobe of wonderful clothes, and everything else she wanted."

Nowhere is this uneasy alliance between clutter-clearing and consumption more apparent than in the pages of *Real Simple* magazine, whose motto is "Do Less, Have More," with the editorial emphasis falling on the "Have More" part of the equation. To be fair, the magazine regularly makes gestures in the general direction of the simple life. A recent article revealing readers' responses to the question "Which woman's life do you admire, and why?" featured a large black-and-white photograph of Dorothy Day, a co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement: "Constantly surrounded by our society's desire to consume, she chose purposeful poverty." Certainly this worthy woman would make an estimable role model for many people, but presumably not for most readers of *Real Simple*, which is filled to capacity with advertisements for luxury items, some of them garden-variety—six-burner stoves and Mercedes-Benzes and such—but many others of a highly specialized nature. There are regular ads for an American Standard bathtub of a remarkably silly design (it looks like a Shaker writing table into which a bathtub has crash-landed), which will set you back \$1,400 but may not "simplify" your life as much as would taking a can of Comet to your old tub and making do with it. Almost every feature

pitches one product or another, with purchasing information always included right up front. In essence *Real Simple* is a magazine about shopping; this is a fact that the advertisers embrace forthrightly. "Inspired by Shaker design," reads the copy on the bathtub ad, "not necessarily the lifestyle." Each issue begins with a series of full-page "Simple Solutions" that tend to run along the following lines: "Simplify" your home exercise program by throwing out your free weights and buying stretch bands (\$8.00) and a digital heart-rate monitor (\$50). "Simplify" your cleaning routine by dumping surface clutter into the Container Store's foldable mesh cubes (\$3.00 to \$12). "Simplify" your wine rack by (don't try to follow the logic here, or your brain will melt) "upgrading" its contents with \$19 bottles of "rich Penfolds Old Vine Shiraz-Grenache-Mourvèdre," which (unlike the stretch bands and the mesh cubes) have the advantage of being unlikely to end up crammed into a closet where—foster children of silence and slow time—they will surely turn into clutter, drain your energy, bum you out, screw up your sex life, and inspire you to write to Oprah begging for a bailout.

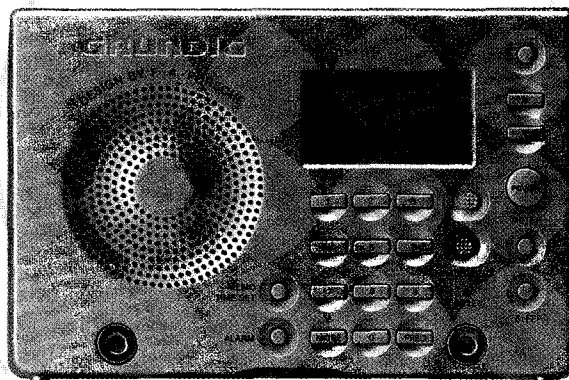
De-cluttering a household is a task that appeals strongly to today's professional-class woman. It's different from actual housework, because it doesn't have to be done every day; in fact, if the systems one implements are truly first-rate, they may stay in place for years. More appealing, the work requires a series of executive-level decisions. Scrubbing the toilet bowl is a bit of nastiness that can be fobbed off on anyone poor and luckless enough to qualify for no better employment; but only the woman of the house can determine which finger paintings ought to be saved for posterity, which expensive possessions ought to be jettisoned in the name of sleekness and efficiency.

A generation ago peaceful cohabitation with a certain amount of clutter was possible, because so many other aspects of home life were ordered and regular. Perhaps only those of us old enough to have grown up in houses in which the old ways were observed—in

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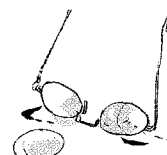


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which dinner was eaten in the dining room, and care was taken not to track dirt on good carpets, and wet towels were not left to sour—know what is missing from so many homes today. The current upper-middle-class practice of outsourcing even the most intimate tasks may free up valuable time for an important deposition, but it by no means raises the caliber of one's home life. My children attend a rather soigné Los Angeles preschool whose élan was recently jeopardized by a recent outbreak of head lice. Parents were given brochures from a service that takes care of the problem in one's home. This seemed a more attractive prospect than spending a morning combing for nits. But on reflection, having someone come to my home to delouse my children seemed perilously close to having someone (presumably not the same person) come in and service my husband on nights when I'd rather put on my flannel nightie and watch *Dateline NBC*. There's a point at which you have to suit up and do the job yourself; otherwise family members start to wonder whether they're living in a home or in a sort of lawless, anything-for-hire (albeit well-appointed) Bangkok flophouse. What's missing from so many affluent American households is the one thing you can't buy—the presence of someone who cares deeply and principally about that home and the people who live in it; who is willing to spend a significant portion of each day thinking about what those people are going to eat and what clothes they will need for which occasions; who knows when it's time to turn the mattresses and when the baby needs to be taken out for a bit of fresh air and sunshine. Because I have no desire to be burned in effigy by the National Organization for Women, I am impelled to say that this is work Mom or Dad could do, but in my experience women seem more willing to do it. Feminists are dogged in their belief that liberated, right-on men will gladly share equally in domestic concerns, but legions of eligible men who enjoy nothing more than an industrious morning spent tidying the living room

and laundering the dust ruffle have yet to materialize (and those men who do fit the bill tend not to be objects of erotic desire for hotshot young copywriters and cardiologists). If you want to make a feminist sputter with rage, remind her of those dark days in America's past when girls took home-ec classes and boys took shop. But to watch yuppie parents squirm with dread and confusion when anything in their households goes on the fritz is to wonder whether it was such a bad thing for one half of the marriageable population to know how to mend a fallen hem and the other to have rudimentary knowledge of the workings of a fuse box. And to see such people frantically dropping wads of cash on hanging shoe racks and designer closet organizers is to suspect that they don't even know where to look for what they've lost. Many Americans of substantial means live in houses in which the prospect of a hot home-cooked meal at the end of the day is



dim, in which beds are left in a tangle of sheets and blankets rather than being properly aired and made each morning, in which a button popped off a shirt renders the shirt unwearable for weeks on

end or quite possibly forever—because who has time to sew on a button? And who even knows how anymore? And let's not imagine what quarrel about gender-linked tasks the predicament might foment. ("To make an omelette, you need not only those broken eggs but someone 'oppressed' to break them," Joan Didion wrote long ago in an essay on the women's movement.)

The book *Not Your Mother's Life* describes the arrangement the New York literary agent Amy Lowe made with her husband: she would keep her high-powered job while he stayed home with the children. Yet she still has to do all the family laundry: "He'll throw a load in the washer where it sits all day," she moans; "or he'll leave it in the dryer so it's all wrinkled by the time I get home from work." Nor have the "folding lessons" she has given the man (surely a marital high point) done a lick of good. Browbeating one's mate into providing a higher standard of

housework is, we've all come to agree, morally objectionable (see the recently re-issued *The Feminine Mystique*, currently in its zillionth printing and still smokin' hot about the outlandish notion that one spouse might earn the money for a family's keep while the other provides the actual keep), so the stalemate established sometime in the mid-seventies remains.

All the quarrels and manifestos concerning the divvying up of housework (if this many people had spent this long discussing, say, the Battle of Thermopylae, they'd have left a record of infinitely greater variety and usefulness) have advanced the cause of housekeeping not at all—have in fact made of housekeeping a lost art. It is this art that Cheryl Mendelson hopes to revive in this generation's most important book on the subject, *Home Comforts: The Art and Science of Keeping House*. She takes careful stock of the many unsuccessful ways in which people attempt to create homes that hark back to the standards and comforts of an earlier era: ways that include elaborate and costly interior-decorating schemes or “nostalgic pastimes—canning, potting, sewing, making Christmas wreaths, painting china, decorating cookies” (an allusion, perhaps, to Martha Stewart and the phenomenal success she has enjoyed promoting just such projects during the very years in which housekeeping has severely foundered). Most unsuccessful of these various approaches are overly rigorous home-organization protocols, whose devotees “arrange their shoes along the color spectrum in a straight line and suffer anxiety if the towels on the shelf do not all face the same way,” Mendelson writes. “They expend enormous effort on what they think of as housekeeping, but their homes often are not welcoming. Who can feel at home in a place where the demand for order is so exaggerated?” Of housework, that hideous and reviled pastime (the “drudgery” of housework is the accepted description, as though the work still involved emptying chamber pots and wiping down bedposts with kerosene rags to ward off bedbugs), she writes, “Having kept

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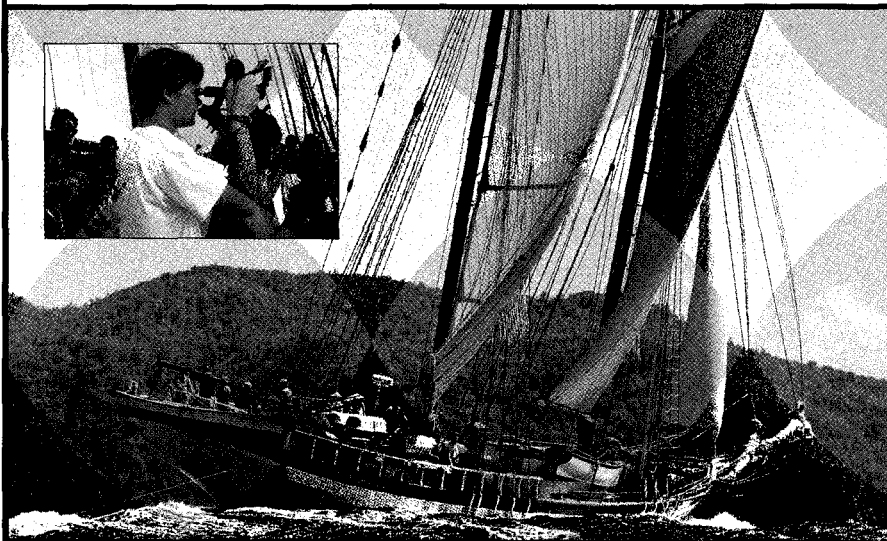
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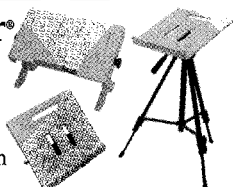
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house, practiced law, taught [in addition to a Harvard law degree, Mendelson holds a Ph.D. in philosophy], and done many other sorts of work, low- and high-paid, I can assure you that it is actually lawyers who are most familiar with the experience of unintelligent drudgery." In Mendelson's opinion, the widespread collapse of housekeeping explains a multitude of domestic woes: "Television often absorbs everyone's attention because other activities (such as music-making, letter-writing, socializing, reading, or cooking) require at least a minimum of foresight, continuity, order, and planning that the contemporary household cannot accommodate." That her book

is exhaustive is among its principal delights (my favorite chapter includes "a brief glance at the history of dusting"), but whether its prescriptions will engender noticeable change is highly debatable. (I confess that although I adore *Home Comforts*, I read it exactly as I often read cookbooks—straight through, enraptured, but finding no more of a call to immediate action than I found in *Bleak House* or *Our Man in Havana*.) How much easier it is to hire a professional to sort the children's artwork and arrange it by date in handsome leather-bound portfolios that nobody has time to look through except perhaps—here's a growth industry—someone hired for the purpose. ■

BOOKS

NEW & NOTEWORTHY

Stories of doomed affairs, by Richard Ford; a "profoundly satisfying" literary correspondence; children of the Middle Ages

.....

In his new collection of stories Richard Ford returns to territory he has worked before, most recently in *Women With Men* (1997)—a world of infidelity, selfishness, and self-deception. The theme is stated up front, in the first, brief, fablelike piece, "Privacy," whose narrator leaves his marriage bed to spy on a woman undressing in front of her window. "I don't know all that I thought," he ruminates. "Undoubtedly I was aroused. Undoubtedly I was thrilled by the secrecy of watching out of the dark." Nothing beyond this flutter of lust comes of it, and later he realizes how misplaced his desire really was. Looking back, he insists that his marriage was still happy then, but he alludes to a grave failure yet to come, as if this episode signaled the beginning of the end.

The stories that follow take the reader deeper into failed marriages and misguided love affairs, often uncomfortably so, asking if true intimacy is possible. Wales, the protagonist of "Quality Time," is so self-conscious, and



**A MULTITUDE
OF SINS**

by Richard Ford
Knopf, 304 pages
\$25.00

so removed from the world, that he feels almost nothing for his married lover, let alone for a woman he sees run over on the street. Fear of self-revelation is a barrier for him, just as it is for Faith, in "Crèche," and for Henry Rothman, in "Dominion," yet it's so much the core of their personalities that it's impossible to overcome. As the narrator of "Puppy" says disparagingly of his wife, "She becomes involved in ways that are far too emotional. Distance is essential."

Throughout *A Multitude of Sins* a lack of trust comes between lovers, a holding back that interferes with any communion, dooming their indiscretions and ultimately leading—even as the affairs stagger on—to heavy regrets and ugly recriminations. Men and women alike are left groping for meaning, hoping that there's something significant in these faithless couplings. Ford undercuts the gloom and self-pity of his situations with irony and a resigned wisdom. Although his material is essentially similar across the collection, his approach is pleasantly varied. The anecdotal "Reunion" uses a plainspoken first person; "Charity" and the near novella-length "Abyss" have a quirky, deadpan

humor; and "Crèche" relies on a montage of affectless passages.

Ford's achievement, though, isn't in the range of his palette but in how closely he focuses on the regrets of middle age, the hopes his characters still have, and the chances they take, aware that they may be fools, chasing after desires even they can't understand. Every decision is a risk that defines who they are at heart. As Ford says of the unhappy couple in "Dominion," "Ending it then would've meant something about themselves neither of them would've believed: that it hadn't mattered very much; that they were people who did things that didn't matter very much; and that they either importantly did or didn't know that about themselves. None of these seemed true." In *A Multitude of Sins*, Richard Ford's lovers come to uneasy terms with the impossibility of knowing each other and the inescapable pain of knowing oneself. —STEWART O'NAN

One evening in October of 1955 a retired Eton schoolmaster, George Lyttelton, and a former pupil, the middle-aged London publisher Rupert Hart-Davis, agreed to exchange letters once a week. The correspondence lasted for seven years. When it was published in six volumes (in the 1970s and 1980s), it was widely acclaimed as "superb," "profoundly satisfying," "crusty," and "civilized." I would be somewhat more enthusiastic: *The Lyttelton/Hart-Davis Letters* are, at least for those of an old-fashioned literary bent, the most delightful bedside books of our time.

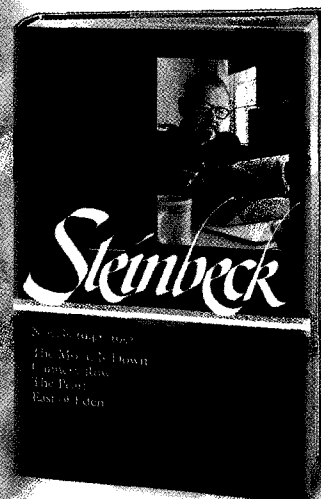
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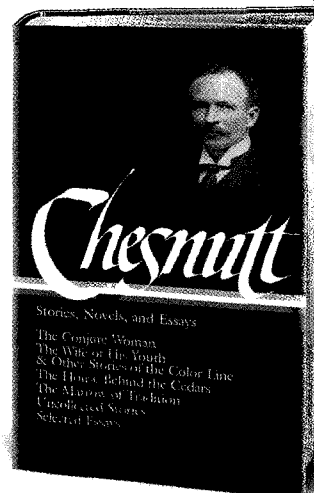
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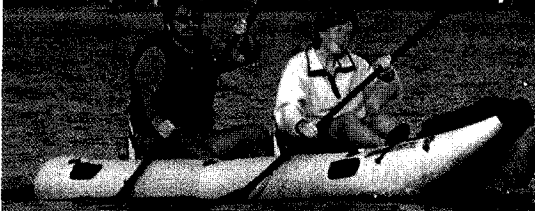
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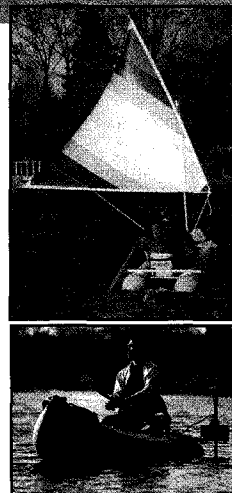
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unique beauty?" Alas, who in these times even reads beautiful yet half-forgotten novels like *Earlham*? As the correspondence proceeded, Hart-Davis revealed that he collected E. Phillips Oppenheim thrillers and revered Max Beerbohm, that he worked doggedly on his annotated edition of Oscar Wilde's letters and then nearly every evening rushed around London giving after-dinner talks and presiding at meetings. Lyttelton's quieter life—marking school exams to keep busy and puttering around in the garden—allowed him to shine in his quotations: Bernard Shaw's best and most touching sentence, he suggested, was one about the actress Ellen Terry, whom the playwright loved: "She became a legend in her old age; but of that I have nothing to say; for we did not meet, and, except for a few broken letters, did not write; and she never was old to me." A few weeks later Hart-Davis quoted the historian G. M. Young: "Being published by the Oxford University Press is rather like being married to a duchess: the honour is almost greater than the pleasure." Both revealed in Gibbon's celebrated footnote about the Emperor Gordian: "Twenty-two acknowledged concubines and a library of 62,000 volumes attested the variety of his inclinations, and from the productions which he left behind him, it appears that the former as well as the latter were designed for use rather than ostentation."

Over the years these two bibliophiles approvingly discussed the prose-music of Carlyle and A. E. Housman; argued about the merits of *How Green Was My Valley*; agreed that *Martin Chuzzlewit* was Dickens's best book; shared a dislike for Jane Austen, Theodore Dreiser, and *Lolita*; and admired Oliver Wendell Holmes and Macaulay, "who thought many of Socrates's dialectical victories were too easy." It is all utterly, irredeemably bookish. Roger Hudson's abridgment makes this epistolary conversation a bit more staccato than it was originally, but has the merit of leaving out the analyses of ancient cricket matches. If you like Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, or Flaubert's correspondence with Louise Colet, or the essays of Cyril Connolly, you really should treat yourself to these wonderful and—be warned—addictive letters. —MICHAEL DIRDA

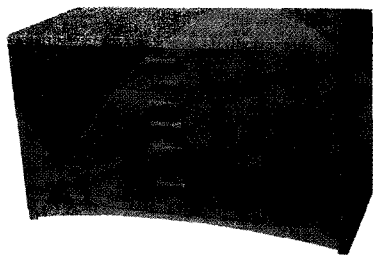
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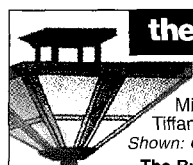
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The 1970s have become an object of such reflexive parody that it is often hard to look at those years as anything other than an opportunity for ridicule. Jonathan Coe's funny and astute new novel avoids this impulse to caricature as it traces the sentimental education of a group of teenage classmates in the much maligned English city of Birmingham from 1973 through 1979. Coe fills in this broad canvas with a series of comic set pieces that poke gentle fun at his characters while also deepening their appeal. In one, several boys team up to form an art-rock band with the hilariously Tolkienesque name of Gandalf's Pikestaff, only to see the group devolve into The Maws of Doom after the punk movement blows through town. When an auto-factory manager takes three employees to dinner in an attempt to avert a strike, the class distinctions between them are revealed in what they choose as accompaniments to the inevitable steak and chips: the boss recklessly orders "peas and mushrooms on the side"—"a touch of sophistication that was not lost on the others." Blue Nun is the drink of choice; the lyrics from Yes albums are dissected with Jesuitical zeal. And a family's wind-blasted, rain-drenched vacation in a camper park in Wales will ring true to anyone who has made the mistake of trying to take a summer holiday in the United Kingdom.

Coe's attempts to tackle more-serious themes prove less uniformly assured. His evocation of police brutality against striking factory workers reads like plain old agitprop, and his inclusion of the IRA's horrific Birmingham pub bombings in the narrative is awkward and ultimately bathetic. His treatment of the racist politics of Britain's National Front, however, is wonderfully deft, as a student prankster lampoons the Front's bombast in the school paper in a manner that would have made Auberon Waugh proud. The contrast reminds us that the strength



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of *The Rotters' Club* lies in its comic humanity, not its anger. If Coe is right to claim that the 1970s were "brown times," then it is a testament to his skill that he has rendered them in such vivid colors. —STEPHEN AMIDON

People who concern themselves with the treatment of the mentally ill can generally be put into one of two categories: those who push drugs, and those who push therapy. In this historical philippic the medical reporter Robert Whitaker firmly sides with the latter.

He marshals all the attributes of investigative journalism—the liberal use of quotation marks, the tireless attention to malfeasance, the deep-rooted mistrust of authority—to argue that what he stubbornly calls "mad medicine" is and always has been misguided in its emphasis on physical therapies. His narrative begins in the "unheated, dingy" asylums of the eighteenth century and goes on to describe such ingenious innovations as bleeding, forced sterilization, organ removal, induced coma, and lobotomy. But the author's main concern—and the subject of more than half of this book—is the drug revolution, sparked by the introduction of Thorazine, in 1954. From that moment, Whitaker argues, psychiatrists picked up their prescription pads and dropped their patients, distracted by a need for acceptance from the medical community and by the lavish attention of pharmaceutical companies.

Whitaker's book, though marred by a lack of focus and by an overeagerness to ascribe unattractive motives to well-meaning scientists, scores a few valuable points. It is most damning in the evidence it gathers of the collusion between pharmaceutical companies and medical researchers—an unholy relationship if ever there was one. The book is most sensible in its call for humility. Biological psychiatry has made tremendous and valuable strides in



MAD IN AMERICA
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the past fifty years (most of which Whitaker doesn't acknowledge), but the field is still an infant that acts like a grandfather. What we don't know about the causes of mental illness dwarfs what we do know, so an abiding concentration on the experience of the patient, which this book advocates above all else, is in itself a valuable prescription. —DANIEL SMITH

A little learning is just enough to get things completely wrong: on those admittedly very rare occasions when the subject of pre-modern childhood comes up in conversation among self-described sophisticates, they inevitably insist that "childhood"



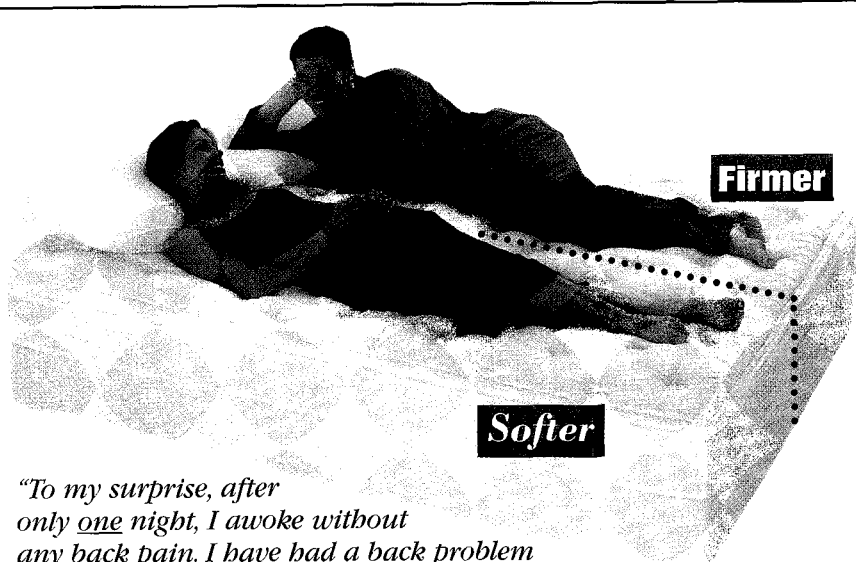
MEDIEVAL CHILDREN

by Nicholas Orme

Yale, 388 pages \$39.95

is a modern concept and that medieval parents were largely indifferent to their offspring. Such views are mere parroting of the received wisdom, most famously promulgated in the 1960s by the then-trendy social historian Philippe Ariès, who, relying far more on theory than on evidence, asserted that the deep bonds of love and care between parent and child that we now associate with the nuclear family were essentially nonexistent in prior times. Over the decades, though, careful historians have been dismantling that interpretation. Nicholas Orme's exhaustive and fascinating portrait of medieval English childhood is the latest and perhaps most cogent of such works—and it demolishes the Ariès thesis. Orme, a distinguished if at times recondite historian (*Early British Swimming* and *The Minor Clergy of Exeter Cathedral* are among his previous fifteen books), examines and assesses a breathtaking range of source material—from primers, diaries, and poems to coroners' records and ancient shoes—and concludes, in a triumph of judicious scholarship and common sense, that medieval children were "ourselves, five hundred or a thousand years ago."

Ariès asserted that because the death of children was so common,



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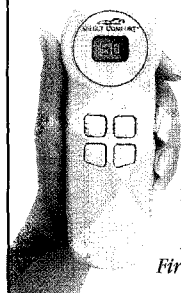
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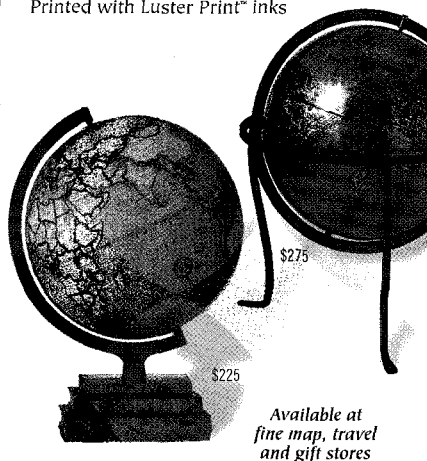
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parents, expecting the worst, were less emotionally attached to their offspring than are parents today. True, an astonishing number of children died (probably at least 42 percent before the age of ten), but Orme convincingly—and heartbreakingly—argues that parents cherished their children no less, and grieved no less at their loss, than do modern parents. His survey of a vast and complex subject is lightened by his obvious fascination with some of its more obscure details (children's emotional and religious world view, their reading habits, and the everyday dangers they faced), which makes his work both authoritative and eccentric. Orme's is one of the most beautifully and intelligently illustrated academic works I've encountered; in this and in his sensitive, reasonable, and lucid weighing of confusing and generally sparse evidence, *Medieval Children* is a model of accessible scholarly history. —BENJAMIN SCHWARZ

In our age the memoir has become an exalted form of complaint, in which friends, family, and society itself are peevishly taken to task. But when Hector Berlioz sat down to tell his story, in 1848, the creator of the *Symphonie Fantastique* had other fish to fry. He meant, as he wrote in his preface, to set the record straight on his own life, but also to deliver a crash course for aspiring composers, in order to acquaint them with the perils and pitfalls of the trade. Regarding the latter, Berlioz tended to be gloomy: "The art of music, long since dying, is now quite dead. They are about to bury it or rather throw it on the dung-heap." Yet the *Memoirs*, which were not published until after his death, in 1870, are unlikely to have discouraged a single aspirant to the musical throne. They are too exuberant, too acerbic, and too entertaining—even when (or especially when) the author is caught up in one of his all too frequent Romantic agonies.



THE MEMOIRS OF HECTOR BERLIOZ

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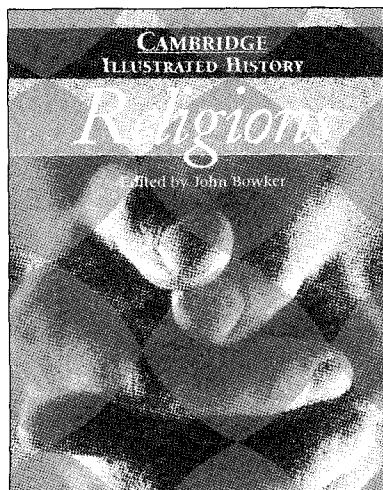
Determined to avoid a kiss-and-tell confession, Berlioz refracted his life through his art. An episode of puppy love, then, produced this comical snapshot of the artist as a *very* young man: "My youthful essays in composition bore the stamp of a profound melancholy. Almost all my melodies were in the minor. I was aware of the limitation but could not help it. My romantic Meylan passion had edged my thoughts in permanent black crepe." Elsewhere, though, his narrative instincts prodded him toward bravura storytelling. Indeed, the tale of his betrayal by the pianist Camille Moke, which nearly drove him to murder and suicide in 1831, has the snap and sizzle of Stendhal (whom Berlioz observed shortly thereafter in Rome, a "pot-bellied little man with the mischievous smile," driving his carriage through the sewage flooding the Piazza Navona). Other adventures took the author across the length and breadth of Europe, where he ran with a nineteenth-century equivalent of the Rat Pack: Liszt, Mendelssohn, Paganini, and the occasional crowned head.

The *Memoirs* were first translated into English by a Victorian sister act, Rachel and Eleanor Holmes, in 1884. David Cairns, the author of the definitive biography of Berlioz, produced his own version in 1969, which he has further updated for this edition. The result is a superbly readable text that should win the author a wider audience than ever (although I wish that Cherubini, the hero's arch-nemesis at the Conservatoire, weren't made to sound so much like Chico Marx). According to at least one witness, Berlioz's last words represented a kind of parting shot at posterity: "They are finally going to play my music." But as it turned out, that was only the half of it—they were going to read his book, too. —JAMES MARCUS

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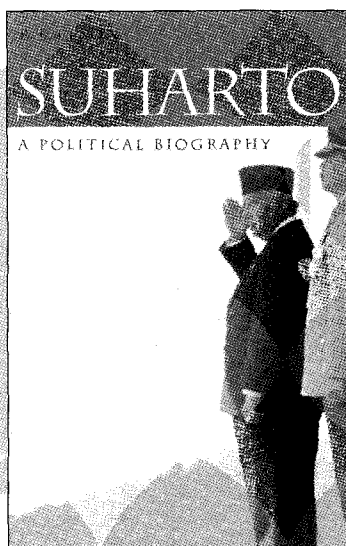
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THRILLING DESPERATION

Edna O'Brien's new novel fashions a powerful metaphor for a blighted son of Ireland

BY BROOKE ALLEN

.....

The fictional world of Edna O'Brien has evolved a great deal during the more than forty years she has been writing. Her first novels—*The Country Girls* (1960) and its two sequels, *The Lonely Girl* (1962) and *Girls in Their Married Bliss* (1964)—constitute a deliberately shocking declaration of independence, a defiant cutting of the umbilical cord attaching their author to Mother Ireland. O'Brien likes to quote James Joyce's description of Ireland as a sow that eats her farrow, but in her own fiction she depicts it more as an imprisoning mother from whose stifling embrace one must struggle to escape.

The early novels were personal, autobiographical to a certain extent, and largely about women coping with the inconvenient reality of their own intelligence and sexuality within a culture O'Brien had experienced as "enclosed,

fervid and bigoted." With disenchantment and sometimes heavy irony (the lives of *Girls in Their Married Bliss* are anything but blissful, for example), they

are portrayed dealing with sex in and (more often) out of marriage, the destructiveness of lust, the passions and the claustrophobia of family life. O'Brien has occa-

sionally been compared to Colette, and her early works do bear a certain resemblance to the Claudine novels, although they are, on balance, angrier.

O'Brien's debut novel, *The Country Girls*, was banned in Ireland, as were her six subsequent novels. In 1954 she left Ireland and moved to London, where she still lives and writes. "You have to go if you find your roots too threatening, too impinging," she has said. "I do not think that I would have written anything if I had stayed. I feel I would have been watched, would

have been judged (even more!), and would have lost that priceless commodity called freedom."

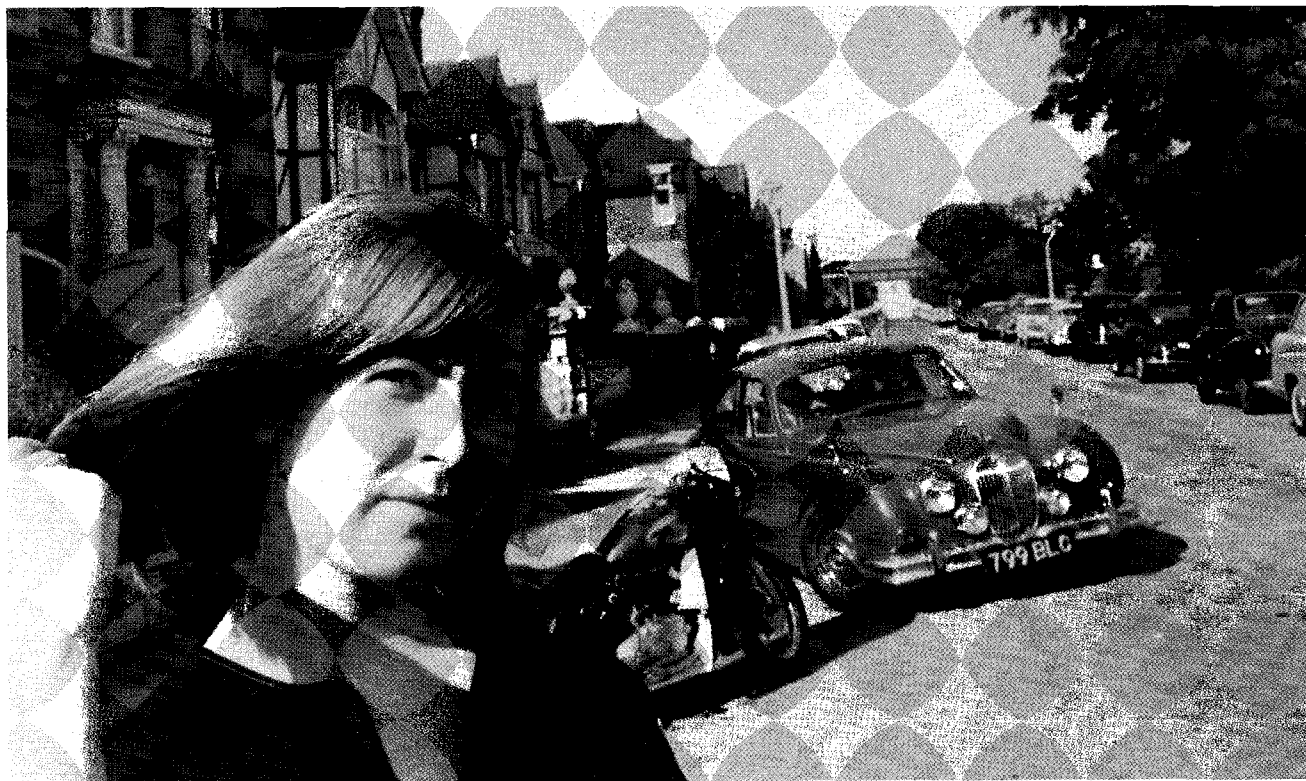
Ireland, however, has remained her subject. The novels of her middle period, such as *Casualties of Peace* (1966) and *Johnny I Hardly Knew You* (1977), continued in a personal vein: they tend to center on women with failed marriages, alienated children, and unhappy love affairs. In the mid-1990s, though, O'Brien's work underwent a significant change as she juiced up her style to a new level of lushness and broadened her fictional scope to include not merely people within Ireland but Ireland itself: its history, politics, and character.

None of her books has been specifically political; rather, she has in her past few novels taken political and social issues and transformed them into art. "What I am after is a bit of magic, and I do not want to write tracts or to read them," she insists. *House of Splendid Isolation* (1994) tells the story of an IRA fighter who takes refuge in the home of a lonely woman; its unwillingness to choose sides politically offended many readers. *Down By the River* (1997) is a fictionalized version of the infamous "X trial," in which an adolescent girl who had been raped by

IN THE FOREST

by Edna O'Brien

Houghton Mifflin, 272
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HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

a friend's father was taken to England for a legal abortion and then pressured to return to Ireland, where she became the center of a nationwide debate. *Wild Decembers* (2000) is a Faulknerian tale that explores the unspoken ancestral rages and passions within an isolated rural community in the west of Ireland. O'Brien's new novel, *In the Forest*, is, like her two previous novels, inspired by a true story: the 1994 murders of a young woman, her little son, and a priest by a deranged man in County Clare.

"When anyone asks me about the Irish character, I say look at the trees," O'Brien once said. "Maimed, stark, and misshapen, but ferociously tenacious." She has used central symbols with great effectiveness in the past (in *Wild Decembers*, for instance, a smart new tractor brought to the village by a smart new man stood for everything the novel's stunted protagonist longed for and feared), and here, in *In the Forest*, she fashions a powerful metaphor for the character of one of Ireland's most blighted sons: a forbidding image of a forest that is as blighted as he. "Woodland straddling two counties and several townlands," reads the novel's opening sentence, "a drowsy corpus of green, broken only where the odd pine has struck up on its own, spindly, freakish, the stray twigs on either side branched, cruciform-wise."

Michen O'Kane has been warped by his environment as surely as have these pine trees. O'Brien relates the story of his childhood and his ruination in twenty swift, masterly pages: the sadistic father; the loving but powerless mother, with whom Michen identified totally; the rough, unsupervised reform school; the monks, some kindly, some abusive, all trapped in the clutches of the monolithic Church; and most of all the community—self-protective, exclusive, unforgiving. The small boy who loves and tries to shield his mother becomes, by degrees and for one reason and another, a sociopath so frightening that he is dubbed "Kinderschreck" (or "bogeyman") by a German living in the neighborhood. By the time O'Kane is twenty years old, not even the police feel equal to coping with him, and after

having been ejected from one institution after another, he wanders his native countryside freely, ranting and delusional, terrorizing the populace, who recognize that he is in a sense their own creation, "one of their own sons come out of their own soil, their own flesh and blood, gone amok."

Darkness is drawn to light, and so the benighted O'Kane is drawn irresistibly to a newcomer, a vibrant young woman named Eily who, with her small son, Maddie, has come to live in the same rundown cottage in the forest that O'Kane himself took refuge in as a boy. Eily is what the locals call a "blow-in"—a peripatetic, hippie-ish visitor. She is, or wishes to be, a free spirit, and she has chosen the cottage, surrounded by brambles and undergrowth, for its isolation and rugged charm. O'Kane sees her as the Sleeping Beauty, a princess who must be awakened by him. It is love of a sort, but all he knows of women is his dead mother and the girls in pornographic magazines, "their throats waiting to be slit."

There is never any doubt about how this story will end, and O'Brien shows her skill not so much in plotting as in her remarkably effective use of symbol, image, and impression. Eily, for instance, along with eliciting a memory of O'Kane's never-forgotten mother, is both Blessed Virgin and pagan earth mother as she blows and paints Easter eggs with her little boy. (The skeins of Irish Christianity and paganism interweave through O'Kane's troubled mind and through O'Brien's prose.) And in one of the book's more disturbing moments O'Kane waits by a thrush's nest in Eily's garden for the mother thrush to fly off in search of food; then he crushes her delicate blue eggs in his hands. He is always outside the idyll, trying to get in: "Herself and the child were one, indivisible, and O'Kane, the outcast, had seen that and had wanted it and had had to destroy it in his hunger to belong."

Although O'Brien has been attacked in her native country for what many perceive as irreligion (and it is true that she treats the local Catholic hierarchy with contempt), her larger vision is by no means an irreligious one. God is

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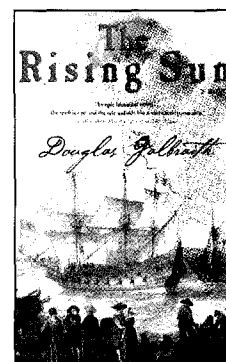
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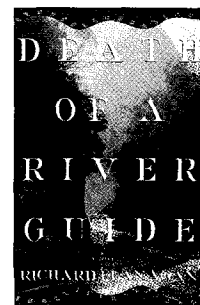
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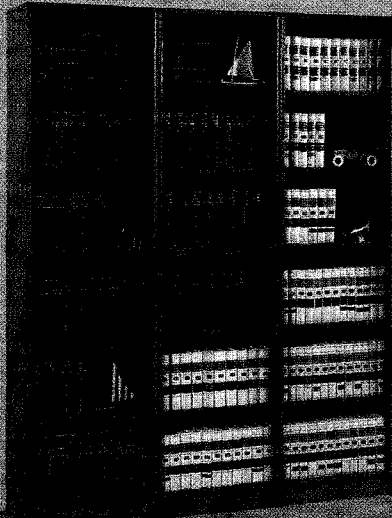
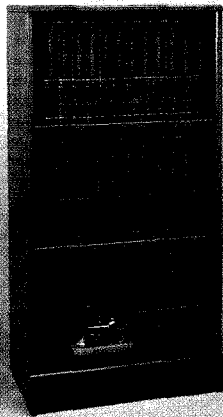
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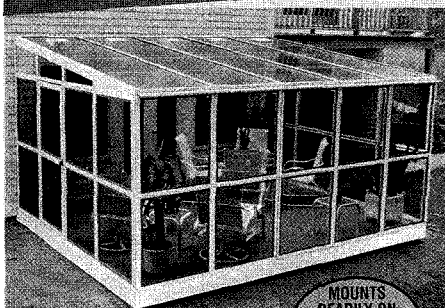
present in her books—not a judgmental God but a watchful one. The community, for example, widely regards O’Kane as the very personification of evil, but such categorization is inimical to O’Brien’s holistic view of life. Late in the novel a bishop who is making a prison visit to O’Kane is caught by the beauty of the evening sky: “a marvel of pale violet, God’s creation, just as the young man in the bed about to take a sip of something is God’s creation as well.”

The two supreme deities in O’Brien’s personal pantheon are Faulkner and Joyce, both of whose marks are clearly visible on *In the Forest*. Faulkner’s influence on O’Brien tends to be benign, Joyce’s less so: the lavish pageantry of his language is not entirely compatible with her less ostentatious style, so when she breaks into Joycean mode (“The wall clock seems both loud and slurpish”), the result is jarring and seems affected, fanciful. The style of *In the Forest*, though, is less Joyce and more O’Brien than that of her recent novels, which is a fine thing. She has said, “I think like a woman and write like a man,” echoing Napoleon’s opinion of Mme. de Sévigné. This statement is inexplicable unless she was referring to her lifelong commitment to Joycean stylistics. In fact O’Brien writes very much like a woman, and Joyce—Molly Bloom or no Molly Bloom—writes very much like a man.

“I want to write thrillingly about desperation,” O’Brien has said. With *In the Forest* she has undoubtedly achieved this goal, but in doing so she provokes a certain fundamental question: Is O’Kane’s madness purely a product of his experiences, or is he in fact a schizophrenic? That he hears voices would seem to indicate the latter. But O’Brien is a Romantic, intuitive and poetic, who seldom stoops to prosaic questions like this one. His madness is an apt metaphor for his world; that is enough. “I’m not sure I have a message,” she once commented about her body of fiction. “Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*, perhaps.” *In the Forest* succeeds resoundingly in delivering this message, and what makes it particularly rich is that we are never really sure just whose scream it is—the characters’, the author’s, or the reader’s. 

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A FAILURE OF INTELLIGENCE

Gilles Kepel's obituary for Islamism was written before September 11

BY WALTER LAQUEUR

.....

Islamism is the most widely discussed -ism of our time, and also the most controversial. It has appeared under various headings, including fundamentalism, radical Islam, political Islam, and *integrisme* (in France). It has been in existence in one form or another for a few decades, but it became a political force only after the death, in 1970, of Gamal Abdel Nasser, which also marked the demise of Nasserism, the most recent phase of Arab nationalism. Nine years later the Shah's regime fell and the Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Tehran from his Paris exile.

By that time, at the very latest, there could have been no doubt that a new movement had appeared on the international scene, claiming to be (and believed by many to be) the wave of the future. It preached a return to the strictest observation of the Koran and the shari'a (as it interpreted them) and the destruction of all its enemies, foreign and domestic. If Khomeini was the prophet of the Shi'ite brand of Islam, Sayyid Qutb had been the inspiration of the far more numerous Sunni radicals. Qutb, a secular Egyptian writer, returned to the religion of his forefathers following a two-year stay in the United States in the late 1940s (a confrontation with a civilization he loathed). Like some other converts, he became a zealot thirsting for martyrdom. A man of mediocre intelligence who did not produce a single new idea, he preached a fanatic obscurantism. Similar figures can be found in the history of other religions, but Qutb also advocated violence—not only against Christians and Jews (something that would not have caused him any trouble in Nasser's Egypt) but also against fellow Muslims who did not accept his version of Islam.



Thus he was on a collision course with the government of the day, and in 1966 Nasser had him hanged.

But the radicalism of Qutb's message and in particular his appeal to violence attracted a variety of Muslims—students who could not find jobs; the religiously

observant lower middle class, distrustful of modernity; and, generally speaking, all those disaffected by the state of affairs in the Muslim world who had become intellectually homeless after the failure of Arab nationalist ideology and of Marxism. Marxism, to paraphrase

Stalin's inelegant saying, had fitted Arab society as a saddle fitted a cow, but it had a certain influence on intellectuals in North Africa and Egypt. Broadly speak-

ing, many intellectual followers of Nasserism and Marxism came to embrace Islamism.

The rise of Islamism was observed with interest and sometimes with sympathy in the West. Influential circles in the State Department and the CIA regarded its adherents as potential allies against the Soviet Union in the Cold War—though not in Iran, of course. This flirtation continued even after the Cold War, when the archives are opened, they will probably reveal that the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs regarded Algerian Islamists with at least some benevolence. American academics were intrigued by Islam, believing that it had a "democratic essence." They regarded Islamism overall as a progressive force, despite such blemishes as its treatment of women and its other shortcomings.

An early and a most perceptive student of this movement was Gilles Kepel, a French political scientist who has trav-

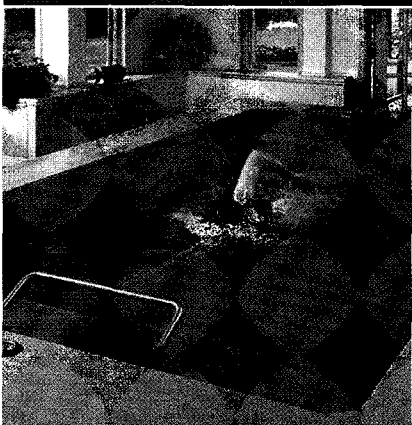
eled widely through the Muslim world and has written about fundamentalism in both the East and the West. He is also the best-known commentator on Islamic affairs on French television, and he has advised international leaders at the Davos conferences. In short, Kepel is not only a leading scholar but also a man of the world. *Jihad* was published in France in 2000 (the American edition has a preface written after September 11). The book is probably the best introduction to Islamism currently available. Nevertheless it shows that even some of the best-informed students of the subject published obituaries too early. Kepel certainly failed to foresee recent developments. In other words, *Jihad* is also a study in intelligence failure—a fact that has provoked an interesting debate in France.

The heyday of Islamism, as Kepel sees it, was in the 1980s and early 1990s. The rule of the fundamentalists seemed unchallenged in Iran; power had fallen into their hands in Sudan; Islamists in Algeria and Egypt were trying to overthrow local governments. Furthermore, an international Islamist brigade in Afghanistan resisted and eventually defeated the Red Army. (That Islam caused the downfall of the Soviet empire has become something of a myth among Islamic radicals. In fact the Afghan war was merely one of several reasons, and by no means the most important one, for the collapse of the USSR. It may well be that in the end the Taliban's leaders came to believe their own propaganda and were thus induced to defy the United States, which they thought was much weaker than the Soviet Union had been.)

By the mid-1990s Kepel had reached the conclusion that Islamic radicalism was on the decline. In Algeria, Islamists had been militarily defeated; worse, they had alienated the local population and done great harm to their cause all over the Muslim world by indiscriminately slaughtering tens of thousands of their fellow Algerians. In Egypt, President Hosni Mubarak had weakened the terrorist movement through mass arrests; but quarrels among the militants contributed to the movement's perceived decline as well. (Part of this

JIHAD
by Gilles Kepel
Harvard University Press
416 pages, \$29.95

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story is told in a verbose, repetitive, and not very modest but very revealing autobiography—*Knights Under the Banner of the Prophet*, by Ayman al-Zawahiri, also known as Dr. Death, Osama bin Laden's closest associate.) Sudan, too, turned against the Islamists, in an effort to escape the international isolation into which it had maneuvered itself. It handed over Carlos the Jackal, who had found asylum in Sudan, to the French, who put him on trial. (Khartoum seems also to have been willing to pass on intelligence about bin Laden and his gang.) In Iran there were signs that the regime was mellowing: the moderate Mohammad Khatami was elected head of the government. And in Saudi Arabia some women demonstrated for the right to drive a car unaccompanied by a husband or a male relative.

How to explain the ebbing of a movement that only a few years earlier had seemed invincible? Kepel cites the breakup of the coalition of disparate elements that had constituted the Islamist alliance. In Egypt, for example, the terrorists' excesses—such as the killing of foreign tourists, along with more than a thousand Egyptians—not only offended the sensibilities of the devout middle class but also achieved the desired goal of devastating the economy by destroying the tourist industry. Islamism had initially promised not only spiritual salvation but also a solution to the social, political, and economic problems besetting the Muslim countries. But after a decade of fundamentalist rule in Iran and Afghanistan the young unemployed were still unemployed, and there was no more hope than before.

Kepel, writing before September 11, sees Islamism as both politically and spiritually bankrupt, which leads him to speculations about the post-Islamist age. Like some of his academic colleagues in America (of the Third Worldist school), he pins his hopes on certain reformist Islamic thinkers who not only rejected terrorist violence but looked for a synthesis between Islamic values and modernity—above all for democracy and a civil society. He refers, for instance, to Tariq Ramadan (the grandson of Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt back in

the 1920s), who through his speeches and books exercised a positive influence on Muslims in France by advocating their integration into French society.

But then came the shock of September 11, which makes it more difficult to look ahead with optimism. Had bin Laden perhaps reversed the decline of the Islamist movement? Kepel still believes after 9/11, as demonstrated by his preface, that the future of Islam can be secured only by reconciling the cultural and religious heritage of a great civilization with the requirements of democratic societies in a world that has become ever more interdependent. And so say all of us. But if a handful of terrorists could upset the great historical transformation he envisaged earlier on, there may have been something doubtful about the basic assumptions underlying his optimism.

Soon after the attacks on Manhattan and the Pentagon, Kepel and some like-minded Orientalists came under fire in France. Earlier there had been a debate, in the Paris journal *Esprit*, between French scholars of Islam and political scientists, with the former arguing that the latter were too secular and Eurocentric and thus had underrated the staying power of fundamentalist religion. But this was a family quarrel, of which the wider public hardly took notice, whereas the attacks on Kepel and his friends after last September were more basic: How could one talk about a post-Islamist age, as Kepel had, at a time when Islam was the one great world religion that was still expanding? Why had the message of bin Laden and other fanatics been treated as something akin to the Catholic theology of liberation? Even Tariq Ramadan, of whom Kepel expected so much, was a conservative, closed in his views to the fundamentalists. If he favored a modest opening to modernity, was this not because he was a citizen of Switzerland, teaching at a Swiss university? How relevant was such a thinker to what went on in the Muslim world? Little more relevant than the publications of relatively liberal journalists in "Londonistan," the world's center of both fundamentalist and non-fundamentalist Arab immigration.

Because Kepel and his fellows must have been aware of the facts, perhaps

their misjudgment had something to do with their ideology—their belief that in a conflict between the West and the East the former must be guilty more often than not, just as the Israelis were always bound to be guiltier than the Palestinians, and Christianity guiltier than Islam. Kepel's friends at the Sorbonne, in Aix-en-Provence, and at Sciences Po—France's centers for the study of Islam and Islamism—rushed to his defense. The debate was on the whole less heated and poisonous than similar exchanges between American scholars of the Muslim world and their critics. (This is not surprising, because the misjudgment of Kepel and his friends was minute compared with the misjudgments of American academics, many of whom considered any publication about terrorism in the Muslim world not just politically incorrect but mere propaganda, inventing a nonexistent threat.)

Although it would be ridiculous to have expected from Kepel or from his American counterparts knowledge about the planning of bin Laden's attacks, about targets and weapons, it was perhaps not too much to expect some information about al Qaeda's ambitions and planning. After all, Kepel had for many years been a leading student of the radical Islamist groups in Egypt, the very groups that produced the ideological inspiration and many of the fighters for bin Laden. (It is probably no exaggeration to say that "it all started in Egypt." The Saudis and the North Africans who joined al Qaeda were inspired by the Egyptians—but then, Egypt had always taken the lead in the Arab world.) And it was precisely in the illegal booklets of Egyptian terrorists that the keys to al Qaeda strategy could be found. But Kepel, who once followed their publications closely, apparently lost interest in the topic too early. One such document, "The Strategy of Conflict With the West," makes it clear that the terrorists were bent on more than just ushering the Americans from the Arabian Peninsula or destroying the state of Israel or righting other perceived wrongs from the Balkans to the Philippines; they aimed at no less than the worldwide defeat of the West and the triumph of radical Islam.

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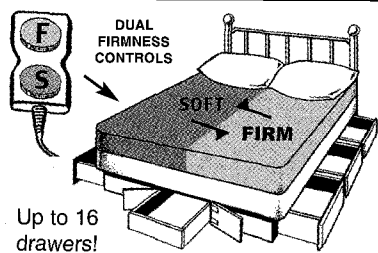
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Where to find these texts? It would not have been necessary to penetrate bin Laden's inner sanctum. They could be found, for instance, in the book *Im Namen Allahs* (2000), by Eberhard Serauky, an expert from the former East Germany who, from his vantage point in a Cairo university, diligently followed and analyzed the publications of these groups. Serauky's book is not on the shelves of the Library of Congress, and I doubt that it can be found in any American library. But this document and similar ones could have been obtained by Western Orientalists. The trouble is that Kepel and his fellows would have dismissed these documents as the fantasies of marginal groups of little or no political interest to the outside world. September 11 proved that this bias was a great mistake.

It is to be hoped that reality catches up with Kepel's dream of a new dawn of freedom and democracy rooted in the great tradition of Muslim civilization. But it certainly won't happen soon. One of the most common mistakes committed by intellectuals in politics is to assume that certain recognized evolving trends will culminate in the near future. These thinkers underrate the enormous obstacles and ignore the retarding factors that inevitably prolong such evolutions.

Has Islamism, desperately clinging to old doctrines, really lost most of its support? In Iran, perhaps, and in Afghanistan—that is to say, in the societies that were directly exposed to Taliban rule or something similar. But even in Afghanistan the rulers would probably have hung on to power for a long time absent foreign intervention. And will the mullahs in Iran ever voluntarily surrender power? The end of Islamism will come only as the result of a long, drawn-out process or, more likely, as the result of a violent internal conflict. Meanwhile, the prediction by some nervous observers that a giant firestorm would engulf the whole world if America went after bin Laden has not been

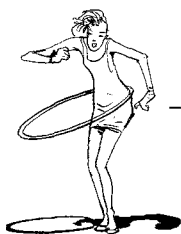
realized. (Robert Fisk, a British journalist who made this prediction more vociferously than anyone else, was beaten up by some irate Afghans.)

However, the same conditions that gave birth to Islamism thirty years ago persist: economic stagnation or even negative growth, the unemployment of the young. So do resentment and free-floating rage. If Islamism is bankrupt, where is the ideology to replace it? A nationalist-socialist doctrine could emerge, perhaps with the same ingredients as before but in a different admixture—a populism more Islamic but also in some ways more secular, overseen by regimes headed by leaders with military backgrounds. But it is difficult to see how such regimes would promote the civil society and lead to the new enlightenment that Kepel forecasts. And in the meantime, the temptation remains to regain dignity and power not through real change but through the shortcuts of terrorism.

Furthermore, which segments of the population could be the agents of the renaissance Kepel foresees? The intelligentsia are as confused as before, and their main preoccupation is finding culprits abroad, such as the Elders of Zion and the Western imperialists, for the misery of their society. The precondition for any real change is self-criticism, an honest and pitiless search for the deeper reasons why things went wrong in the Islamic world, why others are strong and Islam is weak, why its societies have become cultural deserts. Such critics have existed in the Muslim world, but so far they have been voices calling in the wilderness.

Considering the continuing fatal Western dependence on Middle Eastern oil and the various crises forming on the Middle Eastern horizon—the uncertain future of Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction—one can only hope that the changes Kepel envisages will take place soon. A number of clocks are ticking away, and for all we know, there is not much time left. ▮

The Atlantic Monthly (ISSN 0276-9077) is published monthly except for a combined issue in July/August by The Atlantic Monthly Group, 77 N. Washington St., Boston, MA 02114 (617-854-7700). Periodicals postage paid at Boston, MA, Toronto, Ont., and additional mailing offices. Printed in U.S.A. Subscription queries: Atlantic Customer Care, Box 37585, Boone, IA 50037-0585 (or call 800-234-2411). Privacy: We make portions of our customer list available to carefully screened companies that offer products and services we believe you may enjoy. If you do not want to receive this information, please write to the Customer Care address above. Advertising and Circulation: 200 Madison Ave., 20th floor, NY, NY 10016 (646-695-8500). Subscriptions: one year \$19.95 in the U.S. and poss.; add \$8.00 in Canada, includes GST (123209926); add \$15.00 elsewhere. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement 0261327. Back issues: send \$7.50 per copy to The Atlantic, Back Issues, 1900 Industrial Park Dr., Federalburg, MD 21632 (or call 410-754-8219). Vol. 289, No. 3, March 2002. Copyright © 2002, by The Atlantic Monthly Group. All rights reserved. Postmaster: Send address changes to Atlantic Address Change, Box 37585, Boone, IA 50037-0585.



THE PUZZLER

by EMILY COX and HENRY RATHVON

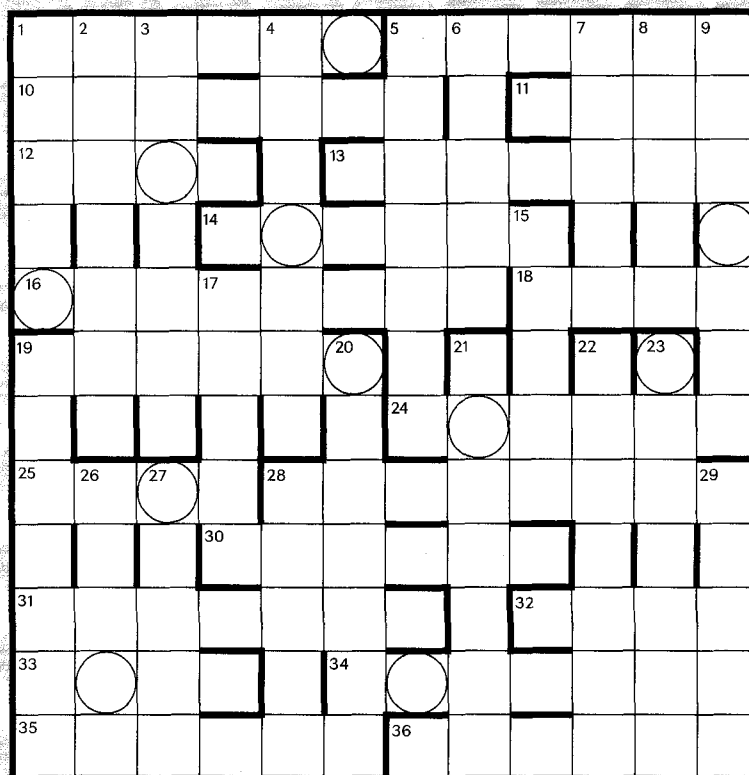
Working Overtime

Your hardworking puzzle crafters have made a special effort to see that 17 clue answers are entered into the diagram with a change. The term for our extra work, and also the nature of the 17 answers' change, can be seen in the circled letters of the finished diagram when read column by column from left to right. There are six capitalized words among the clue answers, and two more among the altered words in the diagram.

Last month's Puzzler solution is on page 118.

ACROSS

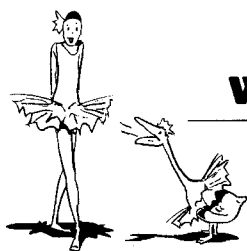
1. Lacking courage, and small-minded? (6)
5. Absorbed by legal matter, a court appears stimulated (6)
10. Pretend to be Hepburn when you speak with calm (7)
11. State how the pig got repeatedly skinned (4)
12. Private eye hot for engineer (4)
13. Private eye with composite payment in Egypt (7)
14. Painter's entering all but the finale (6)
16. After outbreak of scandal, be embarrassed and split (8)
18. Some Native Americans dance on the 4th of April (4)
19. Listened to pleasant rock made in bands (6)
24. Some fundraisers I have set among AMA members (6)
25. Declare a victory that really smarts (4)
28. Mostly pay lease for mom and dad (8)
30. Furtive and crafty about newspaper publicity (6)
31. Resists accepting one's ranks among the exalted (7)
32. Medical drama popular where the Irish dwell (4)
33. Hunter's quarry turning tail in long grass (4)



34. Female hit hard in affair? (7)
 35. Ripped into Social Security reserves (6)
 36. Run where bulls are getting even with matadors? (6)
- #### DOWN
1. Particular details required for glasses (5)
 2. The Spanish item for activity in a wood shop (7)
 3. A clerk crookedly pockets \$100 for pop? (7)
 4. British composer's lying in alien grave (7)
 5. Pull apart, pinning ear back (4,3)
 6. Facilitated mutation of a seed (5)
 7. "X" on returned trouser material (5)
 8. Hamper that is in backward place (3,2)
 9. Tales of southern conservatives (7)

15. Knife a figure of importance to Hindus (5)
17. Opinions compete over The Bard's initials (5)
19. Gendarme's first arrest busted bands (7)
20. Most active member of the clergy after school (7)
21. Crease in rink Lew fixed (7)
22. Tip about article causing forgetfulness (7)
23. Working the land in distant Chinese dynasty (7)
26. Film essential to provide objectivity (5)
27. Cut tip off pinker bush (5)
28. Fortunes left in baked goods (5)
29. Special jargon for log-in corrupted (5)

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.



WORD COURT

by BARBARA WALLRAFF

DAVID WILLIAMS, of London, England, writes, "Growing up in Montreal, where French and English mingle more than they do in many places, I was accustomed to ordering an *entrée* before the main course, even on English-language menus. When I moved to the States, I found that the *entrées* in fact *were* the main course and that an *appetizer* whetted the palate. Now that I'm in London, I can't find *entrées* anywhere and have to be content with *starters*. Can you comment on the seemingly strange usage of *entrée* in the United States?"

Either some of my sources are mistaken or everyone has been waffling on the meaning of this word. In French, in non-culinary contexts, *entrée* of course means things like "entry" and "beginning," so it's unsurprising to find that the classic mid-nineteenth-century French dictionary *Littre* defined the culinary *entrée* as a dish served at the outset of a meal. However, by the mid twentieth century the second edition of *Webster's New International Dictionary* was reporting that an *entrée* is "in French usage, a dish served between the chief courses." The same dictionary went on to say that "in English usage" the word refers to "a rather elaborate made dish served before the roast, such as creamed sweetbreads, a fruit fritter, or a timbale; also the course in which it is served," and that "in hotel usage" an *entrée* is "a meat dish not classed as a roast; also a meat substitute, such as macaroni and cheese." This last idea is probably where the now standard American sense, "the main course of a meal," came from, as most of us stopped demanding fish *and* an *entrée* *and* roast-meat, plus soup and dessert, on a typical evening. Indeed, by the mid twentieth century other American dictionaries were giving "main course" as an alternative meaning for *entrée*.

The English *starter*, by the way, is an

upstart. The *Oxford English Dictionary* calls it colloquial, and some of its citations, all dating from 1966 to 1979, are contemptuous: for instance, "There was avocado pear for what some people disgustingly called '*starters*.'" All the same, *starter* has begun to appear in American dictionaries as a synonym for *appetizer*, without any notation about its being either British or cheesy.



KRISTINA NILSSON, of Newton, Massachusetts, writes, "In nearly every current book I read, the author has somewhere benightedly used the word *crescendo* to describe an arrival rather than a process. For instance, in the *New York Times* best seller *In the Heart of the Sea*, by Nathaniel Philbrick, I read, 'Their physical torments had reached a terrible *crescendo*.' As a professional musician, I take umbrage. *Crescendo* is a term meaning to travel from, say, a pianissimo to a fortissimo, and at the end of a *crescendo* one might be said to have arrived at a *climax*."

Thanks for spelling out the problem so clearly. Although the likes of F. Scott Fitzgerald and P. G. Wodehouse have written *crescendo* where they meant the peak rather than the approach to it, a number of language authorities frown on this usage.

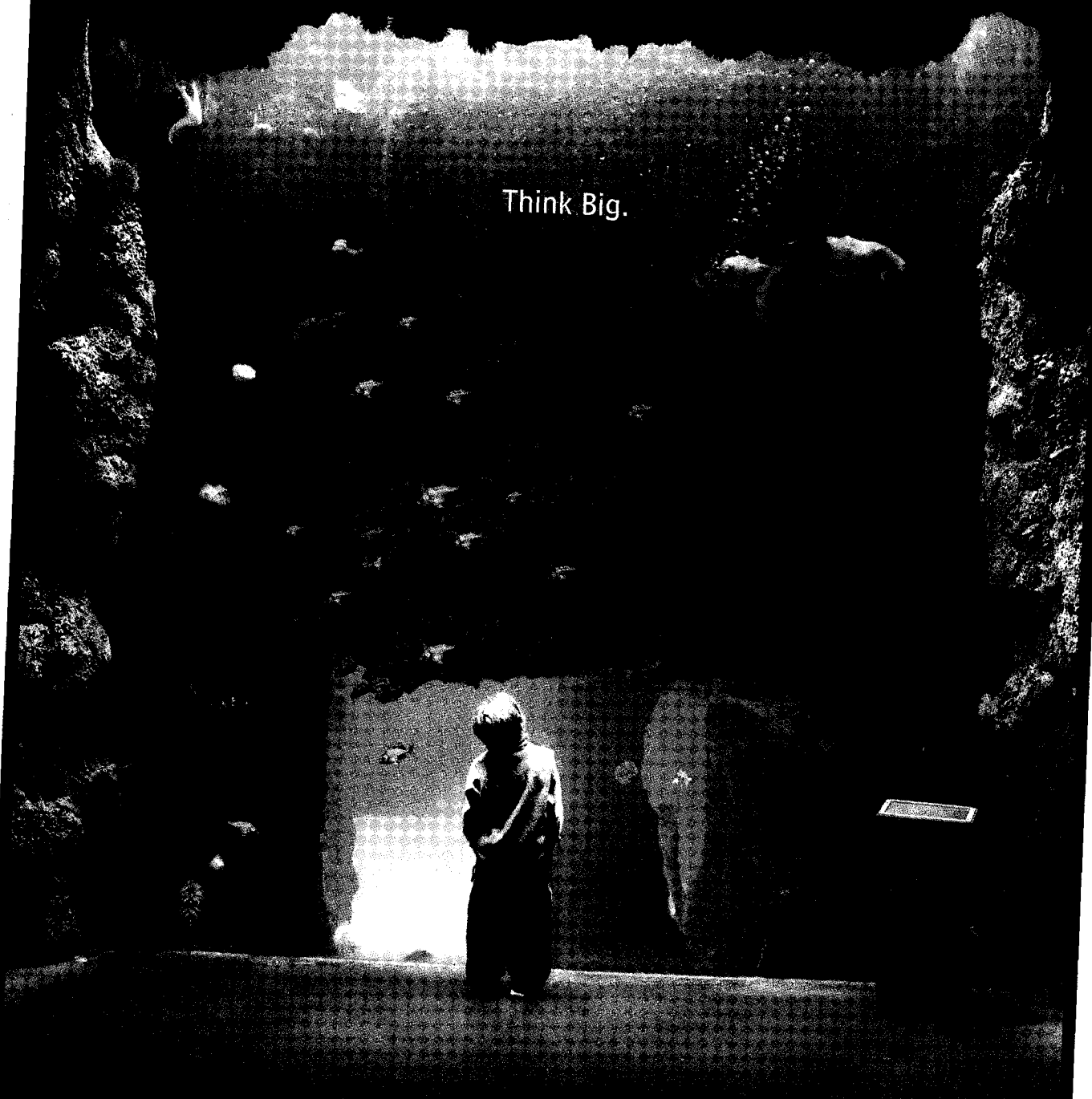
THOMAS L. HOLLADAY, of Arlington, Virginia, writes, "Here in Washington, D.C., I have observed the increased misuse of the title *General* in addressing the present Attorney General—as in '*General* Ashcroft.' I was a consul general for several years in three different countries but was never addressed as *General*. If '*General* Ashcroft' is correct, does it follow that we so address the other civilian generals: Surgeon, Solicitor, Comptroller, Director, and so forth? Or should we reserve the title for military generals?"

You're right that John Ashcroft is sometimes called "*General* Ashcroft." For instance, President George W. Bush's spokesman, Ari Fleischer, referred to the Attorney General that way in November, and Secretary of State Colin Powell did so in December. You're right, too, that this usage is wrong.

In fact, even in military usage *general* was originally an adjective. Time was, that is, when *brigadier general* and *major general* were understood as terms parallel to *consul general* and *attorney general*; all these terms, as Steven Pinker notes in his book *Words and Rules*, "were borrowed from French when England was ruled by the Normans in the centuries after the invasion of William the Conqueror in 1066." In French most descriptive adjectives are used "postpositively," or after the noun, though this word order is relatively rare in English. Thus our military noun and military title arose through misunderstanding. By now they've won legitimacy—but only in military usage. Anyone in the U.S. Army, Air Force, or Marine Corps above the rank of colonel may properly be called *General*, but no civilian should be.

Do you have a language question or dispute? Write to Word Court in care of The Atlantic Monthly, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, MA 02114, or send e-mail to MsGrammar@theatlantic.com. All letters become the property of Word Court. Ms. Grammar is also on the Web, at www.theatlantic.com/courtrecord.

GREG CLARKE

A black and white photograph of a person standing in a vast, dark cave. The person is silhouetted against a bright light source in the distance, creating a strong backlight effect. The cave walls are rugged and textured, and the overall atmosphere is one of scale and mystery.

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